BURDENS

ROWAN ORME

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BY

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" The old year's dead hands are full of these dead flowers

The old days are full of dead old loves of ours."

THE BURDEN.

THE key to Kit Morrison's career was disappointment. None of us recognised it at the time, or we might have made greater allowances. Some thought him eccentric, others misunderstanding his reticence labelled him conceited: but they were wrong in their judgment. He was the product of a disappointed life, that was all.

A strangely reserved person when he first came out from England. It was useless to attempt to draw him into any confidence as to his own affairs, while his quiet voice, and apparently emotionless face, formed an insurmountable barrier to the curious.

I first heard of his appointment at the club, where some fellows back from polo were discussing it.

"D'you know James Morrison Esq. some address in the Temple, London?" they asked, as I flung myself in an easy chair on the verandah, and called to a native to bring me the longest drink the barman could think of.

"Never heard of him," I replied, "who is he?"

"He's been appointed a judge here, that's all. Another failure at the bar I suppose, coming out to swagger about, and bore us to death with silly stories."

I thought no more of the matter. Judges came to ——— Island, all of them sent out from home, with the highest recommendations, failures could possibly

get from the colonial office. But all the letters they wrote us in advance were just waste paper. We knew men who were a success did not come to an island thousands of miles away, for a salary of possibly a thousand a year, at the age of forty or upwards. To us, in the executive, they were usually a trouble. They had a great idea of their own importance, and filled the office files with every imaginable complaint. We wrote soothing letters in answer, and cursed them for the trouble they gave us behind their back.

Unbalanced, narrow-minded people most of them, and of course argumentative, like all second-rate lawyers. Very severe, and harsh in the judgments, when dealing with certain crimes, for which we who had lived for years in the colony, knew imprisonment to be useless as either a deterrent, or a corrective. "Poor devils," we used to say to one another after every assize, as we watched a chained gang being taken away to work out long sentences in the mines further down the coast, "victims to so and so's ignorance, prejudice, and pride. "For when they returned, we knew

"Something was dead in each of them
And what was dead was Hope."

It was many weeks before I first saw Morrison. I had been out riding and it was late in the afternoon that I turned into the bar at the club to have a cocktail before changing for dinner. Of course I knew at once he was "just out" partly from his fresh complexion, and also from the immense interest he was taking, in what was going on in the street. As soon as I got the opportunity I asked the barman.

"Never seed him before, mister," he replied shewing a heap of white ivory teeth that most Europeans would have been only too proud to possess. "'Sherry,'—he says—but I puts a drop of bitters in to make it go down nice, but he no notice. Stranger I s'pect', not like gentleman live here; they know what dey drink—they do."

I took my cocktail on to the verandah, and sat down a few feet away from where he was standing, studying the passers-by. Presently he turned, and looked at me for a moment, hesitating as to whether he would open the conversation, made a motion with his mouth, and then turned slowly round to resume his absorbing occupation. I had time to get a look at his face, and it struck me then, that whoever, and whatever he was, he was no fool. Clean shaven, with a long straight nose, he gave me one unwavering glance, but in those few instants I was conscious he had taken a good deal of my stock.

"I wonder why a crowd is always interesting," I remarked, as an obvious way of opening up the conversation.

"Different types," he said as he turned to me, "a multitude of men and women passing us by; people we shall never know personally, and need scarcely speculate about. But all human beings leading their different lives, with the crudeness of their nature hidden away out of sight."

I confess I was rather astonished at his words. I had expected a monosyllabic reply, and instead had heard conversation different from what one listened to in the club. He spoke in a low tone with

a touch of bitterness in the voice, that made it the more attractive.

"D'you see that woman, and man over there, talking by the handcart? No! the man with the red handkerchief round his throat,—yes that's him! well what d'you think? Wouldn't you mark him down as a criminal? Look at his close-set eyes, and the keen way he looks at the woman, cannibalistic almost—isn't it? No! his expression doesn't matter much. One of the kindest faces I ever looked on, was one who eighteen years before had committed a brutal murder. He got drunk in order to help him to confess: just weary of slinking about the world, with an inconvenient conscience! I heard him sentenced to death, and I have never seen such a light come into any face, as to his. No! one can't judge by the expression; it's quite unsafe."

He turned away from me leaning over the balcony, apparently watching the crowd. I wondered who he was, thinking it strange he should take such an interest in what seemed to me, such an uninteresting set of people. My curiosity grew, till at last I determined to have it satisfied.

"I suppose you haven't been here long," I ventured by way of opening the conversation afresh.

He answered without turning round.

"Only a few hours. I landed yesterday."

"Have you ever been in these islands before?" I continued.

"Never!"

"Oh! I suppose you came by the P. & O."

"Yes."

I am not easily put off.

"Are you staying long?"

"I think I had better introduce myself," he said abruptly, turning round. "My name is James Morrison. I am the new Judge."

We fell into conversation, talking of England, and contrasting the chances of success there, as opposed to a colony. But his conversation was that of a man trying to force his words, and to appear interested, whereas his mind was occupied with something much more important, and very far away. But he attracted me. Possibly because I was his first acquaintance, our friendship ripened more quickly than with the others. We fell into the habit of dining together at one of the small tables on the verandah at the club, looking out towards the long stretch of beach, the white houses, and the placid blue water. Unlike most of the members, we dined late. Nearly all those who held official positions, and the planters to a man, were married. Men and women estranged from their homes fell into each others arms more readily, than is the case in England. They had plenty of leisure to regret it afterwards. Not that these marriages were all unhappy: far from it: the distractions were few, and most people after some years, if they could not pretend to any great devotion to each other, jogged along easily enough, and avoided getting on each other's nerves. After all life is too short to make a certainty of recognising the ideal.

Morrison belonged to the reserved type of man. Frequently he would come in after I had begun dinner and with a few conventional greetings would relapse into silence. He told me little about him-

self, or why he had come to the Island, but he gave me the impression that he was a man of independent means. Mixing but little in our society, such as it was, yet extremely courteous to both men and women, he came to be regarded as something of a mystery.

Occasionally, as time went on, he gave dinners at his house, and I well remember the surprise created by the first. About a month after his arrival, he invited half-a-dozen of his club acquaintances, to dine one Sunday. The house he had leased was one of the best, just outside the town, and we knew he had spent both time and money in having it thoroughly redecorated. But we were not prepared for what we saw. It was a fine villa overlooking the sea, surrounded by trees and the usual luxurious, and varied vegetation.

The Colonel and I drove down together from the club. An English footman opened the door, and we were shewn upstairs by a butler into a large room, transformed into a library. There must have been at least some three thousand books in cases round the wall, all carefully protected from the dust and damp by glass. Till that moment I had flattered myself on having the only private store of books—not worthy to be called a library—and I felt jealous the moment I entered. All my favourite authors were there, and hundreds I only knew by name. Translations of Turgeniev, Doshevsky; complete editions of Balzac, Guy de Maupassant, Huysmann in the original; a whole shelf devoted to German writers; another to Italian, among which I noted an extremely rare edition of Dante.

As modern English authors there seemed no end. Conrad, Meredith, Henry James, even George Moore —none were missing. It struck me at once, we were in the society of a man, in whom the island had no part.

The dinner was equal in excellence to the library, and the choicest wine, and cigars aided our spirits. We became exhilarated talking in a different tone about our friends, labelling them all swans, and thinking in our hearts, that Morrison was one of the best fellows we had ever come across. One or two overcome by the delight of the evening expressed it openly. Morrison, however, took no notice: he drank little and seemed, if possible, more silent than ever. It was not until ensconced in comfortable chairs in the smoking-room, that he threw off his reserve.

The talk had drifted to the eternal topic of woman. An amorous subaltern without a shilling in the wide world beyond his pay, known to be making an ass of himself over the Colonel's daughter, threw down the gauntlet, upholding woman's superiority over man. Others hotly denied it, dragging out the time-worn arguments in support of this theory. "What is the good," said Morrison gently intervening in the discussion, "comparing men with women? Wherein do they differ? Humanity is the same 'au fond' in either sex: it's merely a matter of development, tempered by the education of centuries. The vaunted courage of man has but a different, a more showy outlet than woman's. Similarly the tenderness in a man is as great as that of a woman, only we have a habit of covering it up, which perhaps is right. We

must be strong, for the burden of the world lies on us. They must be kind, because the burden of us men lies on them."

Then he lit a cigar, relapsing once more into silence.

II.

Morrison's words came back to me the next morning, while enjoying my pipe after breakfast. "The burden of us men lies on women," he had said, and I wondered what he meant. What tragedy in his life had prompted their utterance?

In the weeks that followed they recurred to my mind on many occasions, and the more I thought about them, and the man, the more certain I felt, that they were not spoken thoughtlessly, but were the bubbles that rose from the depths of a man's soul.

His interest in ourselves was obviously small. Though he entertained liberally, he rarely accepted invitations, and visited but few. At first some of the wives of the community resented this, looking upon it as a slight, but he smoothed them down so graciously, that they had to forgive him.

"He's such an eccentric," said one, "and after all why should we blame a man who prefers to dine at home: it's so unusual, it ought to be encouraged, provided he invites us."

So they swallowed his offence, and sipped his Chateau y'Quem as sensible men, and women of the world, in which the friendship that counts, is the friendship from which something can be obtained.

At these dinners, Morrison sat quiet and reserved. Gradually we came to accept him as a fact, and gave up wondering what lay beneath the surface.

It was partly by chance that I made a discovery.

III.

The Spring and the long summer had come and gone, and the few months of winter, if such it can be called, were upon us, when I came to look upon Morrison in a new light. It is trivial things that focus our attention, especially the trivial in other people, because we are so rarely allowed to obtain a glimpse of their inner self.

It so happened that Government business took me to the south end of the island, and the shortest way to my office, adjoining the harbour, led me past Morrison's house. These periodical visits, sometimes made two or three days in succession, sometimes with long intervals between, invariably meant riding back in the dusk, or even long after night had fallen.

On one of these occasions, as I was cantering my pony along the road in the darkness that had now set in, I became aware of a trap in front of me, driven at a rapid rate. It was so unusual to meet anyone along this road on a winter's night, that I fell to speculating as to whom it belonged, and as to their destination. Not only was my curiosity aroused in some sleepy fashion, but also my pony appeared to become inquisitive, and eager to overtake them. I was soon but a few yards behind, when to my surprise, it turned sharply across the road, and disappeared up Morrison's drive, not before I

had noticed that the only occupants were two women. I had seen the trap before, but just for the time I could not recall to whom it belonged, and it was not till I was turning into bed some hours later, that I suddenly remembered the yellow wheels were the hall-mark of a planter, called Dacre.

A curious fellow Dacre! We none of us liked him, and he rarely showed his face at the club. He lived at the extreme South end of the island, several miles out of the town. Perhaps instinctively feeling we disliked him, we were rarely invited to his villa, and more often refused, when we were honoured with an invitation. He was a handsome man, very tall and powerful, with firmly chiselled face, and great dark piercing eyes that shone unpleasantly from under the shaggy eyebrows. One of those people who when they smile, show a set of perfect teeth, while yet conveying the impression of menace. We felt uncomfortable in his presence: there was something sinister, foreboding in the expression. One or two ugly rumours floated through the island, as to his cruelty to natives, his harshness in business, his rudeness to strangers, which if never proved, did nothing at any rate to mitigate our opinion. The club wiseacres shook their heads at him. "There's no smoke without fire," they said, and avoided sitting at his table when he came to dinner. He had married a few years before a woman of extreme beauty: but few of us knew her even by sight. None of us ever had been asked to stay, and they lived too far off for the occasional visit: besides during the summer months they always left the Island.

I confess to having felt a mild surprise in finding that Morrison had formed Dacre's acquaintance. True, he had never made me his confidant, so there was no reason why he should have mentioned it; except that I had by this time become his most intimate friend.

We were having some trouble with the natives, and my time was fully occupied during the succeeding days, so that the incident had completely passed from my mind. Nor did it recur when I lunched with Morrison in his room at the Courts, where I had gone to listen to some decision, in which the executive were interested. I must have completely forgotten it, till one evening, riding back from the harbour, it occurred to me, to look in on him, on my way. I had made rather a detour, and came along a road that stretched at the back of his house, and had ridden up the path that ran alongside the orange-grove, when I came upon the yellow buggy, and the horse, unattended, tethered to a tree. Not wishing to intrude, seeing he was not alone, I turned round and rode back to my house. But it struck me as obvious that whoever was paying him a visit, had no desire to be seen, and that the choice of road, and the hour, were not matters of chance.

I confess this second encounter with Dacre's property, disturbed me. What business was afoot that required such secrecy? Other men's affairs were nothing to me, but I had formed a real affection for Morrison, and had no wish to hear him sneered at, as being a friend of Dacre's. Then I remembered what I had seen only a few days before, and it was with almost a shock that I recalled that his visitors

on that occasion were women. I could scarcely doubt but that one was Mrs. Dacre.

Vague talk of Dacre and of his attractiveness to women rushed to my mind. I had given no credit to them at the time, for it is wise to believe nothing that one hears, and only a little of what one sees. In the matter of scandal a Crown Island is in no way behind an English provincial town, in fact it is a most dangerous society to live in. Everybody knows your affairs, where you visit, how often, and how long you stay. The eyes of your acquaintances follow you from place to place; even your friends are not blind: jealousy is rampant in every form.

I determined to warn Morrison at the earliest opportunity of the danger he ran, in entertaining Mrs. Dacre at all, and certainly in meeting her surreptitiously. The idea that there was anything wrong in his doing so, I could not for a single instant entertain. For over a year he had been a Judge, and had proved a success in every way. Those who came into contact with him professionally were full of his praises: no matter how long the case, how exhausting the atmospheric conditions, he preserved a perfectly unruffled temper, while the increased work of the Court showed that both settler, and native, respected his impartial attitude, and well-balanced mind.

All these thoughts came to me, as I rode home, and long after, sitting in a dressing-gown over a small fire finishing a cigar, a prophetic sense of coming trouble crept over me. Perhaps I had fallen asleep, and was dreaming unquiet things, when I awoke with a start, thinking I heard knocking on the door. I sat still and listened. Yes! it was repeated,

a low, soft, knocking. One can never tell with what intent a night-caller comes to your house, so slipping a small revolver from the mantelpiece into my pocket, I went out into the hall, and opened the door.

To my astonishment Morrison, putting a finger against his lips to stop any exclamation of surprise, stepped quickly inside, and deliberately walked past me into the smoking room. There, flinging off his coat he sank in a chair, burying his face in his hands which were shaking as if he was stricken with the palsy. I poured him out a stiff brandy and soda, which he drank straight off, lifting up a bloodless and ashen face, as he did so.

"I have come to you, Garnett," he said, "but before I say anything, you must give me your word, that you will never let anyone know I have been here to-night."

Obviously, I could not do less. A look of relief passed over his face.

"Thanks, friend," he said, "I felt I could rely on you."

He went to the door, opening it suddenly: the house was perfectly still. But noticing a blind was up, he pulled it quickly down, before returning to the fireplace.

"You think I'm mad, I suppose," he continued, after a long spell of silence. "Well, I ought to be, or very near it, after all I've gone through. If only I could see the end, but I can't! It's so impossible."

"What's happened?" I asked in an ordinary tone, trying to master the emotion that I felt, standing

looking at a man shivering in the throes of some deep mental agony.

" It's so horrible, and yet what was she to do? God! " he cried suddenly jumping to his feet, his voice shaking with intense, and bitter feeling, " why do you persecute some of us day and night, and all through the year, and years? Is it right, is it fair? You drive our very souls to perdition, and turn a wooden ear to our prayers."

I poured him out another brandy which he tossed off as the first. If it had been neat, it would have had no effect on him. But he regained control of himself, and went on.

" Did you know I knew the Dacres? " he asked.

I nodded.

" Yes," he said, " I knew them well. I knew Evelyn Dacre before she was married. We lived in the same part of London, and though I am some six or seven years older than she is, it might almost be said that we were boy and girl together. When I came down from Oxford, she was just coming out of the schoolroom, and a pretty good sensation she made in society. It would have turned the head of most women, but she didn't appear to take much notice, or to care about her success. Her picture was in all the papers, headed ' Portrait of a beautiful debutante, etc.'—you now the sort of thing that editors intent on filling their journal at any price, fling in the face of their subscribers. She had plenty of offers of marriage, and from men who could have given her most of the good things of the world, but she turned them down, one by one, with just a kind

word, and in a way that left no bitterness behind. People said she was too young, and would marry later when the right man came along. How little they knew! The right man never asked her to marry him, and drove her headlong over a precipice."

He took a crumpled cigarette from his pocket, and lit it; but it went out at once. He crushed it into the carpet with his foot. As I watched him I recalled the empty buggy outside his house, half-hidden among the trees, and realised the reason that had brought him out from England. Then I thought of Dacre, with his evil, sinister expression, and the cloud of smoke that I was blowing from my pipe, formed itself into his face, dissolved, and reformed again, always with a leer directed at Morrison.

"Put yourself in my place," he continued. "I was twenty-three or so, with no career in front of me, and an ordinary pass degree in law behind, as a result of three years' work, and play, at a University. Not a bad introduction to life for some, but no use from a practical point of view, to a young man with little ambition, and with an income of about four hundred a year. Besides, my head was full of ideals, and anyone who wishes to bring ideals into modern day life, must soon realise his folly. I had nothing to hope for from either my parents, or relatives. My father, God rest his soul! was then living the ordinary life of a retired Army officer, lunching at his club, and ekeing out a miserable pension. An uncle whom I had never seen, had left me, what money I had in the world, not out of love for his nephew, but because, unable to take it with him, he could think of no surer way of annoying his

descendants. As to relatives—I didn't count with them: there was nothing to be gained by my friendship.

"I went to her first dance, and danced with her most of the night. I forget how many times, it's so long ago since then. But I see her now, often, in my imagination as she came up the crowded staircase, dressed in white, with her beautiful fair hair, and deep violet eyes, shining with excitement. Men spoke to me, who had been content to nod to me before, and fool that I was, I was flattered by their selfish civility, and introduced her to them, one after another. Then it was that I woke up, and found myself a grown-up man, and she—a woman. Where's my glass?"

He took a sip, putting it down on the floor beside him.

"Yes, though I had known Evelyn all my boyhood days, it was only then that I realised I was in love with her. What could I do? Her parents were rich, very wealthy in fact, and they took no pains to conceal their views as to their daughter's future. Within a week from that very night, I was given the cold shoulder. It had been my habit for years, to lunch there on Sundays, but they quickly conveyed to me it was to be a habit no longer. Many a time I have lingered at street corners to catch a glimpse of Evelyn driving out to some party, while I wandered on foot through street after street till it grew dusk, just trying to pass the hours away. I have stood, I tell you, on the pavement outside her house, in the dripping rain, on the chance of seeing her look out of her window, before turning the lights out. You

know, I was young then, and my head was full of ideals."

The gentle night-breeze came sighing across the bay, flapping the curtain. I rose to close the window, and looked out across the garden to the beach beyond. A faint mist hung over the dreaming town. The moon cynical, and cold, looked down from a star-lit sky. Not even the note of a singing-frog disturbed the ghostly stillness of the night.

"You think me a silent man," said Morrison, "but I must talk to-night, and you must hear me to the end, for then you will be able to judge clearly for yourself. I was saying, wasn't I, that although I was almost debarred the house, I used frequently to meet Evelyn elsewhere. Her attitude never altered, she was just the same to me, as she had always been. It would have been strange indeed if I hadn't loved her. I have met many women since then, laughed with them, talked to them, jested with them, even held their hands in the stillness of a room, perhaps kissed them at a dance among the flowers in a conservatory: but those were forgotten in the morning. I never forgot Evelyn. From the night of her first dance, when I tell you I awoke to manhood, she had been to me the only woman the world possessed. Why should I describe what I felt then? It doesn't interest you, how can it? However much we pretend to be interested in other people's affairs, we are really only interested in our own. Anything else is a sham! It's human nature. Poke the fire, it's getting cold!"

I threw on a big log of wood, the sparks of which flew out, lived for an instant, and died. Perhaps

something I had in my thoughts, passed to him, for he looked up quickly, seemed on the point of making some remark, but changing his mind, continued in the same low, passionate, voice.

" How long my secret adoration for Evelyn continued, I do not know. Times changed. My father first, and then my mother died, and I found my income from one cause or another, cut down by another hundred. After I had buried them reverently, and had paid their debts, nothing was left from their estate, for me to inherit. Evelyn and her mother came to the graveside. She was taken away in their carriage directly after, to attend some charity concert. I trudged back from Hampstead alone. Do you think I felt any resentment against her? No, never for an instant; but I felt the world a bitter place. I have not altered my opinion.

" One thing became clear. Until I acquired money in some way, or another, I could not hope to marry her. I loved as deeply as I, or others, are capable of loving, but a gulf, not to be bridged over, was fixed between us. Do you think it was easy for me to realise this, or easy to act on it? Women talked pointedly about the wrong, and the meanness of men living on their wives, and all the jargon of an empty humanism: they said it was degrading, and a man who did so lost all his self-respect. I lay awake at night, cursing my fate, cursing my poverty, cursing everything, even myself, but making only one resolve, which I kept clear before me all those months. Nothing should induce me to tell Evelyn how much I cared for her. I would never degrade her in her own, or other people's eyes, by asking her

to provide the means for keeping me—a husband. I have already said I was young, and my head was full of ideals! "

He paused and took a sip of the brandy beside him, cleared his throat, and continued:

" Pride! that's what it was, false pride! As if it mattered to whom the earthly goods belonged! It wasn't easy to keep to my resolution. Once I remember taking her back in a cab from some house where we had met, putting my hands on hers. If she had spoken more than one word, all might have been so different. But she didn't: she just said ' Don't! ' "

The clock on the mantelpiece struck three times. I remember counting the strokes, and how long the pauses seemed between each. Morrison had scarcely moved his position since he came into the room, sitting huddled up, with his arms on his knees, and his hands clasping and unclasping, he appeared to be talking more into the depths of the fire than to me.

" It is the small events that alter our lives, but that little word did mine—or ours. My resolution returned to me with renewed force. Night after night, sometimes with prayers upon my knees, at other times inwardly cursing my own impotence, I set myself to crush my desires, and hammer into nothingness the longings of my soul. I was called to the Bar, and worked like a galley-slave to master an art I cared nothing about, spending the day and far into the night in reading law, with only one object in view—always to forget Evelyn.

" I was not a fool in everything. A very few months convinced me success in the profession could only come to me in a limited measure, and that I should never make sufficient to give me the right to ask her to marry me. I could not expect her to wait for years while I was thinking it over. I was right.

" One morning a letter came. I knew the handwriting, and tore it open. She just announced her engagement to a man called Dacre—that was all. I sat on the edge of my bed, crumpling the note between my fingers: I have it still, here, at my house: it is torn in two, or three places. It was not long before I met him. What I had guessed from the letter became a certainty. She never loved him, she was being forced into the marriage. Dacre, as you know, lived in England or roamed about the continent the greater part of the year, spending from four to six months out here on his estates. From the very first he took a tremendous liking to me, and in proportion as it grew, so did my dislike of him. He was always asking me to lunch or dinner, referring to me as his wife's oldest pal, and pressing me continually to promise to spend the winter with them in the island. He was a lucky fellow he used to say, to be about to marry Evelyn, but he wasn't going to be so selfish, as to keep all the luck to himself. Marriage should not be the means of destroying the friendship of years,—and that sort of soft, sickly sentiment that idiots talk before marriage. He was a good conversationalist, and clever enough to know how to pitch his tone to suit his ' milieu '. Evelyn's mother thought him the most charming man in London, and probably in the whole world. I don't

know what other people thought, but I know that inwardly I began to hate him.

" Now that Evelyn was engaged I was frequently asked to the house, and once when he was giving out his ideas on life in general, I looked across the table, and found her eyes fixed on me, with an expression I had never seen in them before—a look of fear. He was looking at her, too. It made me uncomfortable. Her mother, like millions of others, anxious to do the best for her daughter, was selling her for her own good! Give me another brandy! "

" The horrible thing," said Morrison after a few minutes pause, " was that the more I avoided Dacre, the more he sought my society. After the marriage they took a flat in London, and kept open house for their friends. Hardly a week passed, that I did not dine there, or go with them to a theatre. At first I refused. He became more persistent in his invitations, telling me of the pleasure it gave his wife to have her old friends about her constantly, and how he personally liked my opinion on plays, and all sorts of other things. ' I want you to look upon me as a real friend,' he said one night after dinner, while we were still smoking in the dining-room. ' I don't often take a fancy to younger men, but I have to you. And besides, Evelyn loves you very much.'

" I looked at him quickly, and at his gleaming teeth; he was smiling at me through the thin cloud of grey-blue smoke, a hellish smile with his teeth hard set, and a tightening of the mouth at the corners. All of a sudden I understood him."

He paused for a moment, listening intently.

" I must hurry," he said, " or I shall not get home before morning. Let me think! what was I saying?

" Yes, I understood him from that moment. As I looked at him, I realised how much he hated me, how much he had always hated me. Unconsciously I had come between him, and his wife. His riches had bought her body, but not her soul. That belonged to me. That had been mine from childhood, was mine when she grew to womanhood, and was mine now. Such things are not altered by any ceremony. This was his revenge. He had guessed how I loved her, saw how I suffered in her presence, knew how I longed to hold her in my arms, and with fiendish cunning meant to torture me by throwing us continually together, and yet never leaving us alone. Knowing human nature, he took no chances. Yes! " said Morrison, regardless of all his precaution, raising his voice till it almost became a screech, " and the devilish part of the whole thing was, he knew she loved me, and used to taunt her with it too. He always referred to me as the ' amant.' She told me so herself, some days ago."

" Devilish! " I muttered.

" We looked at each other through the blue smoke of our cigars, and I made no answer. What could I say? I was looking at his big coarse neck and thinking—what matter? I didn't, I just sat on—and on and on, and smoked in silence. We understood each other.

" I went upstairs to the drawing-room, while he stayed to snuff the candles. Evelyn was at the piano.

" ' Tell me quickly,' I said, holding out my hand to her, ' and tell me on your honour the truth.'

" She took mine in hers. Her fingers were long and thin.

" ' If I go away for ever, will you be happy? '

" I looked at her as I said it, and saw the blood fade from her face, and her whole being begin to tremble violently. She never spoke. I raised her hand to my lips, and, for the first time, kissed it—the first time in all my life! Just at that moment Dacre came in. I suppose he saw us, I didn't care. I had grown older, and had lost my ideals.

" The next day, and the days and months that followed, were the same. Dacre invited me more than ever to the flat, and talked to me in his slimy fashion. I was on my guard, and so was Evelyn: I knew he intended to ruin me, sooner or later. I determined to play him at his own game, and to use him, if I could, for my own ends. Listen! He had large interests in many city concerns. One night, he told me about a company he knew of, and advised me to buy largely. The wine was good, and the liqueur brandy superb, and for a moment I forgot the man, I was sitting opposite. I told him to buy for me. He wanted to purchase thousands, but I was adamant, a hundred shares was sufficient for my purpose. I gave him a cheque the following evening, and within a few days the company burst. He apologised, and said he could not understand the sudden failure. I did, for I had made enquiries in the city. He had been the promoter, was paid partly in cash, and bought the wreckage for a few pounds, selling it again to another syndicate. There's nothing in that, there are always fools to be fledged! Did you get this brandy here? "

I nodded acquiescence. I was thinking of the scene across the dining-room table, with the red-shaded candles, and the cloud of thin blue smoke between the two men.

"Curious how luck, or fate follows one! One night he spoke of an investment that would make me a rich man, if I only plunged. This time I was not to be caught. I had laid my plans. I did as he suggested—plumped—only in the opposite way. I made a thousand. One can gamble in metals, if one doesn't mind the risk. Comparative fortunes are made, or lost in a few minutes when the market is jumpy. It seemed I could do no wrong. In a year I was rich, that is, for a bachelor. Everything I touched was gold. Even at Monte, luck was with me. I knew the run could not last, and took full advantage of it while it did. Do I look like a gambler? No! it gave me no pleasure. The moment I began to lose, I gave it up for ever. I had accomplished my purpose. I had put myself in a position that if Evelyn found life intolerable, she would not have to consider Dacre in any way. I hated the money because indirectly it came through him.

"All this time he thought that I was losing, and used to apologise occasionally. Then one night I told him that I was in a position of independence and thanked him for his tips. He chewed off the end of his cigar, and took the first boat out here. But he understood.

"That was two years and a half ago. During that time she wrote to me regularly, and I answered as if she was nothing to me beyond a mere acquaintance. Then her letters grew shorter, more miserable,

more tear-stained. I knew the truth, I heard it from someone else. People who drug get strange fancies. He had used them most of his life, and they made a brute of him. Under their influence he became capable of any savagery, and the little affection he had ever possessed, soon turned to hate. Perhaps she never responded to his embraces. I don't know, but that was no excuse for beating her. His favourite jest was to accuse her of infidelity with me, I ! who since we had been boy and girl together, had only once kissed her hand, and never even touched her lips ! At other times he would come home late at night, and striding into her room, ask her if she loved him : she couldn't tell a lie, and would turn her face away without answering : her maid used to find her bruised or unconscious on the carpet. Now you understand why you were never invited to visit Dacre.

" Not that she complained of his brutality to me, for she never did, but I heard about it from reliable sources. I wanted an excuse to come out. The judgeship was vacant, and I succeeded through influence in being appointed. He was not pleased to meet me. You see, we understood each other so thoroughly ! "

He kicked the logs into a momentary blaze with his feet, and continued :

" Soon after I arrived, I wrote and asked him to dinner. It may surprise you that he came, but it was no surprise to me. I had counted on it; he wanted to find out how much I knew. He didn't suppose I had left London for nothing.

" There were just the two of us. I had red-shades

put on the candles, and we had almost identically the same dinner. We too! I called his attention to it: he said he had no memory for trivial things, but for all that it made him uncomfortable. Only our positions were reversed, for now I was sitting at the head of the table. The servants brought in the port, and left us in peace. The windows thrown wide open let in a gentle breeze, that kept me cool in spite of my thumping heart. The thin blue smoke of our cigars floated upwards between us.

" It is unnecessary to repeat in detail our conversation. Before he left that night I made it clear to him that he would have to treat her properly, or suffer the consequences. What these were do not matter now. They have become things of the past. He left me with a leering smile on his face, but I felt I had made him understand.

" Two nights afterwards, I was fired at while walking in my garden after dinner. Dacre was impatient not to leave matters too long to chance. I have nearly finished. Give me another drink, no soda: it's so cold."

I took a wineglass, and poured some into it. He drained it at a gulp.

" Quite late in the evening a few nights ago, she —that's Evelyn—drove up unexpectedly. It was about nine, and I had just finished dinner. Remember! All through these months, I had rarely seen her alone, and had never entertained her in my house without Dacre. She came with her maid in their yellow buggy. It was indiscreet,—I told her so —but I knew she had a good reason for breaking the conventional laws. She had. Judge for yourself.

" She came in and sat at the table without being announced. I closed the shutters at once, and drew the light curtains. She took off the thick veil she was wearing, and I saw her eyes were red and strained, and there was a great purple mark on her throat. Dacre had surpassed himself. Her patience was exhausted. She had flown to me for protection. Don't misunderstand me—protection for good.

" A difficult position for any man to find himself in—you'll allow that? I was longing to take her in my arms, and kiss all her tears away : to defy scandal, and to save for her what remained of a partially wrecked life. But I felt I owed a duty to my position : if I had belonged to the executive, yes! but a judge, no! how could I? I sent her back, and went to see Dacre in the morning. I did not tell him she had been to see me. The interview was a waste of breath."

He paused, searching with a nerve-shaken hand for his glass on the floor beside him, and finding it, went through the form of drinking. It was empty, but it made no difference to him, he never noticed it. My own heart was beating violently.

" To-night, once more she came again, this time, alone. She knew where to find me, and waving the servants aside walked in. Something in her manner startled me. She was more beautiful than even I had ever realised, to which was added a new, and imperious dignity.

" I jumped up, intending to help her off with her coat, but she drew back quickly. ' Don't come near me! ' she hissed. ' Don't touch me! Not yet! '

Something in her manner prevented me asking her meaning, and I remained silent. Then she said quite simply 'I have killed him!' "

When Morrison repeated her words I suppose I bounded to my feet, and a cry of mingled horror and surprise must have escaped me, for I remember his continuing in a voice that had sunk almost to a whisper.

"Don't interrupt! When she told me Dacre was dead, I said nothing, I just stood still—looking!

"My tongue dried in my mouth, I lost control of my senses, and my nerves. I was feeling as people must feel, when they have a stroke. I was unable to articulate, my effort to speak producing only a gurgle in my throat. The floor was moving slowly up to my face; I had lost sight of my knees, and the consciousness of standing on my feet: the walls were no longer straight, but were swaying backwards, and forwards like the branches of a tree. Then I thought somebody struck me a violent blow on the head, and brought me to myself, with a dreadful start. She was telling me how it had happened. 'Perhaps you don't know,' she was saying, 'what I have had to put up with lately. He got to hear of my visit here some nights ago, and accused me directly I got back—you can guess the sort of things he said. I was afraid, and locked myself in my bedroom. I had never seen him so violent before, or heard such threats used. The servants prevented him doing me much harm, only my throat is still swollen where he struck me. In the morning I passed him on the way to the kitchen. He was cleaning

his rifle, and never answered when I spoke to him. I don't know why, but he appeared not to like my seeing what he was doing. This evening he sent for me. He had been drugging again, and I knew by the expression on his face, he meant mischief. He said he had new proof of my infidelity. I denied it emphatically. What was the use? Then he told me he had decided to take away the management of the house from me, and I was to give him the keys. I told him where they were, and asked his reason. He took no notice, but ordered me to clear out of my bedroom. I was to sleep in the East wing of the house—among the servants. I refused. " In future," he said, " there's no occasion for you to consider yourself my wife. I will treat you as I damned well please."

" ' He made himself quite clear. I was to give up my room to my maid! a treacherous servant was to be put in my place, to become his mistress! Not that I cared about that! But for me to take up her position! This was more than I could stand. The room grew dark, a cloud seemed to be coming in through the open window; the furniture became indistinct: but he grew larger and larger, and his smile changed to a dreadful leer. We were standing by the fireplace. I hit him across the face with the back of my hand; the diamond left a mark on his cheek. I watched it redden. Then he leapt at me seizing me by the throat, and banged my head against the mantelpiece. Luckily my hair is very long and thick: it was done in a coil at the back.

" ' Half-falling, my hand came into contact with the

heavy poker standing upright in the fireplace. He recovered his balance, and seeing what I held drew back, but only for an instant. Then he came at me: I had no time to look. I saw the gleaming teeth, and felt his hot breath on my face. Then I struck with all my strength. He is dead.' "

Morrison stopped, and wiped the sweat that stood in beads upon his forehead. As for me, I did not know what to say; I just stood there like a child before him. The tragedy was too intense for words.

How long we remained silent I have no idea. It was broken by Morrison getting up. " She has gone back to her home. No one must know she came to me. She will give herself up to the police. Perhaps she has done so, by now."

An idea passed through my mind.

" And you, what will you do? " I asked.

" Nothing," he said, " nothing. What do you suggest? "

" She will be brought before you," I said. " Do you realise that? It is before you, she will be tried —for murder! "

He gave a long-drawn sigh.

" Yes," he answered, " before me! I shall be with her to the end. God help us, both! "

He took his hat, and without another word went out. As I watched him going down the garden path, his figure growing fainter, and fainter, in the mist of the early morning, the recollection of what he had said came forcibly back to me " We must be strong for the burden of the world lies on us: they must be kind for the burden of us men lies on them."

IV.

Those who remember the morning of the trial of Evelyn Dacre are not likely to forget the scenes that took place. Public excitement had been raised to a tremendous pitch, partly by wild statements of his savage excesses, but more so, because she was the first Englishwoman who had ever been brought before the court on the capital charge. The opinion of the white population was entirely in her favour; without knowing the facts most of them expressed the view he had met with a just punishment. The native newspaper was antagonistic, and wrote scurrilous articles that had no foundation of truth concerning her previous history.

Nobody talked of anything else in the club, or in the streets. Copies of her photograph were on sale in every kiosk, and fantastic descriptions of her life in prison were sold everywhere. The town barely went to bed at all the night before the trial, parading the principal thoroughfares and shouting for and against her. It was known that an eminent silk had arrived from London to take up her defence.

Pressure of work prevented me from seeing Morrison since the night he visited me. I had written him several long letters, and had entreated him to come and stay, but though he answered them most cordially, he gave me to understand that he wished to be alone. So I respected his wish, and made no attempt to thrust my company upon him.

I was naturally surprised therefore when he sent me a message to come to dine the night before the trial. He seemed to have altered a good deal in

appearance: he had grown very thin, and his face and body appeared to have shrunk in their proportions, and there was a set look in his face, the expression of a fierce despairing courage. During the whole of dinner he never referred to the case at all, and I was filled with admiration for a man who could put such a seal upon his lips. He hardly tasted the wine before him, sitting with his elbows on the table, and the tips of his fingers resting against each other, staring out through the open window, into the moonlit darkness beyond. I, too, felt that I could not eat, or drink in the presence of a man, in whom such an agonising struggle was going on. What little conversation took place, was about life at home, and I thought that whatever the result of the trial, in a very short time, we should know Kit Morrison no more.

As he bade me good night, he pressed my hand warmly: and as I was driving off, I heard him distinctly mutter to himself as he turned away "To-morrow! . . . . To-morrow!"

During the progress of the trial I waited in the club nervous, and anxious. Some of the others had been down to hear the opening. "Morrison's a splendid judge," said one. "Of course, he only knew Mrs. Dacre slightly, but all the same it must be devilish awkward. I wouldn't care to be in his shoes."

"Does Mrs. Dacre know the judge?" queried a second. "I'm asking because when she came into the dock I thought they both stared at each other, for quite a long time."

"Who engaged that K.C. to come all the way

from London," asked a planter called Stebbings, a real disciple of Peeping Tom. "Bet some man in the background has cashed a pretty substantial cheque."

Just at the moment came murmurs of voices of a crowd far away in the distance. The telephone bell rang in the bar. I jumped up, straining my ears to catch the sounds. The barman rushed in shouting to us "Acquitted."

* * *

Evelyn Dacre left the island, as quietly as she came to it. Since the trial she had remained in complete seclusion declining to see any of the numerous sympathisers that the evidence produced had rallied to her side. Educated opinion had no doubt Dacre had but reaped his due reward, and would certainly have murdered her in the study, if she had not struck him a lucky blow in self defence. As to Morrison's conduct of the trial, everyone was loud in his praises; even the eminent K.C., entertained to dinner at the club before his return, declared he had never appeared before anyone who held the reins of justice so impartially.

A few months after this Morrison told me he had applied for leave.

"I shall not return," he said, "though I don't wish it known at present, that I intend to resign. We shall be married almost directly. You must come and stay with us when you come home. Write to my club in London, and the letter will find me somewhere, or other. There will always be a room at your disposal."

Sometimes after dinner, I watch her sitting with her hand in his. My thoughts fly back to the island, which I, too, have left for ever. The pale blue smoke of my cigar floats upwards, and as I look at them, I think that he was wrong when he said to me on that dreadful night, that he had grown older, and had lost his ideals.

THE UNFINISHED MANUSCRIPT

THE UNFINISHED MANUSCRIPT

I DON'T know what determined me to speak to him, but I resolved to do so the moment I saw him. It was a gamble of course, which might turn out trumps or otherwise. In any event, it wouldn't make any matter.

I knew his type at once. I spotted him in the hall, when he arrived alone, tired, and dirty, having obviously travelled straight through. He asked for the room he always had, and seemed relieved when he found it was vacant. But he took no interest in the people lounging about, hardly so much as glancing at them, and went straight upstairs. To my surprise I found myself watching for him to come into dinner, which he did rather late, and unobtrusively. At its best the food was poor: crowded as the hotel was at this time of the year, it had become positively degenerate. Remonstrance was useless. The Patron merely patted his fat stomach and talked about the gross incompetence of chefs. The other hotels were no better: that was the cardinal virtue of the Majorca.

We sat at small tables, neatly arranged so many feet apart along the side of the room, like well-thumbed novels in a bookcase. At intervals the waiter whisked away our plate, asking us what we would like to follow, as if we liked anything on the

menu, or could get any other food? But we drank our chianti in the straw coloured flagons, dreaming a jumble of day-dreams of the twelfth and twentieth centuries, so full of delights and wonderful regrets, that the shortcomings of the modern hotel shrank into insignificance.

For some reason or other my mind was running on "Frederick" and "Mme. Arnoux" in Flaubert's "L'Education Sentimentale" when he came in. He had the air of a man indifferent to his surroundings, infinitely careless as to those about him. Had he spoken, he would have said "No! I cannot make friends like other people: there is nothing amusing in me, nothing attractive. If things had been different, I might have cared desperately, constantly for someone, but——" and the sentence would have remained unfinished, for that little word expressed the sum total of his whole character. Something had prevented his education being completed.

He sat facing me at the next table.

I watched him play with his glass of wine, his fingers moving up and down the smooth stem, as if the polished surface was soothing to his feelings. Our eyes met once or twice, but he dropped his immediately: he wished to remain solitary, unscrutinised. There was nothing to be gained by an aggressive friendship. I knew the type of the lonely man too well.

We sat close to one another in the lounge, smoking. It is certain he was an epicure in tobacco: anyone could see that at a glance. You had only to watch the careful manner he looked at the selected one

from a well-filled case, to know in what direction he found some little compensation. It was the way he examined the cigar that told you this. He did not pinch, and listen to the cracking of the leaves, but looked carefully along them, to see if they were both dark, and richly veined. He lit it, and with the puffs of smoke, was wafted once more far away from the hotel, and became again indifferent to everything, except perhaps the memories that always float in thoughtful minds.

Even when he rose, walking to and fro, with his eyes fixed on the carpet, just as if he was in his own smoking-room, I never doubted for an instant, but that he was recalling some strong emotion that once had overwhelmed him.

I fell to wondering what this could be.

Whether it was mental, in the sense of being unconnected with troubles about worldly facts that one can never dissipate altogether? or was it an experience on a higher plane, visionary, but none the less terribly real? And as I wondered he stopped, and sat down at a table quite close, in fact it was just between us.

" It's very cold to-night," I said, by way of opening the conversation.

He assented, with a slight inclination of the head, as if he was conscious of some one speaking to him through a fog.

" One never expects Italy to be cold," I continued, " one thinks of it only a land of sunshine, and companionship. The cold is so lonely."

I said the word on purpose. He looked at me quickly.

" Cold and loneliness," I remarked, " go hand in hand."

He rose, and paced the lounge again to the other end, where a log fire burned brightly. I waited knowing he would return.

" Why d'you say that? Do you think I am lonely? " he asked, drinking off the remains of the cognac.

" A man who studies the pattern of a hotel carpet," I said, " has either nothing to occupy his thoughts, or too much."

" I am married, and have two children," he answered.

" Proved! " I retorted. " They are not here. Yet I would wager you a glass of the best brandy, that your thoughts were not with them."

" What makes you say so? " he asked.

" Observation," I replied. " Observation of men and women: of their expressions. You were neither smiling or frowning, therefore your thoughts were not of any present facts: they were of something far off. I don't want to be inquisitive! "

He flicked the ash of his cigar with his little finger.

" This is the tenth year in succession I have been at this hotel," he said, " and before that elsewhere in Italy. I know the country well. Florence is full of memories to me. I don't come in the spirit of a Tourist."

" You hope to recapture the past."

My words struck him forcibly.

" How d'you know that? " he asked, " are you clairevoyant? "

" No," I said. " But for what other object can

you come? Is there anything strange in my guessing it? Are we not always trying to do this? The older we grow, the more we long to live again in the emotions of our youth. Old age is nothing but the loss of this power. We would give all of what we possess, to feel afresh the ecstasy of joy, and even sorrow, We spend the years chasing the shadows."

"Youth! youth!" he muttered, "that I let slip without a thought. Youth! with all its hopes unrealised! Youth! the playground of a thousand dreams! Good-night!"

I watched him edge his way among the tables, and pass out through the glass doors into the hall. A cold gush of air swept through the lounge. People shivered, and women drew their wraps about their shoulders. His words repeated themselves to me, seeming to become imbued with life, to hang in flashes in the air.

"Youth! youth! the playground of a thousand dreams!"

II.

He was in the Uffizi the following morning contemplating the disputed Georgone's "Concert." I saw by his expression thaat he was pleased to see me. He motioned me to a seat in the corridor beside him.

"Odd! how you interested me last night," he said. "Trying to recapture the Past! That was the phrase I think you used? It's not much good, is it? it's too elusive."

He talked in a strange jerky way, more to himself really than to me.

" The present occupies most of our time," I answered, " in fact, it keeps some of us absurdly busy."

He passed his hand over his forehead, like a man trying to wipe away a memory.

" The town appeals to me. I am always drawn to it. Sometimes I think it's habit that brings me here, year after year. The moment I set foot in it, I feel younger, more like the self that has faded, gone! where I don't know! It comes back to me here! "

" Completely? "

" Not altogether. Perhaps that is too much to hope."

I looked up at the delightful grotesque paintings on the ceiling, thinking of the dead artists' work, and of the carvings. Germans and Americans passed, guide-books in hand, admiring what they were told to praise, aggressive with their loud throaty voices, or nasal accents. An obvious Englishman was pointing out the imaginary defects of the " Youthful Minerva " to a vulgar long-faced woman hanging on his arm: he looked for solidity, good British solidity in everything and preferred the Victoria statue opposite the Palace to this flimsy, effeminate stuff. I caught him saying to her, " he liked to know the sex of every creature, and not to have the thing in doubt."

" I was very young when I came here first," my friend continued. " Young enough to believe in myself and in my hopes, and ambitions. Youth is precious! "

" A delusive period," I said, " unbalanced, but

delightfully genuine. It never hesitates to desecrate the shrines of the dead geniuses to raise altars to the living mediocrities. It deceives only itself."

"Deception!" he turned towards me with a quick piercing look.

"Certainly," I answered, "it is a star in the tail of the comet."

"D'you think it possible for deception to last a lifetime?" he asked.

"It depends on what sort of deception you refer to."

"No!" he said determinedly, "one can't deceive oneself, year after year. It's only a question of coming under the same influences at the right time. These never die. They may be hidden away in our souls, and we cannot call to them always when we wish it, but they will return to us sometime or other. Let's go back to the hotel, it will soon be luncheon time."

We left the palace, strolling quietly in the brilliant sunshine along the streets. I looked over the bridge at the Arno, careering to the distant sea. Some women washed their linen from the bank. A fisherman toiled at his nets.

"I used to write a great deal," he began after a long silence. "It was here that I discovered myself. No! I was never successful from the popular point of view. I don't think I ever wanted to be. I have only written one book."

I had to confess to him there and then that I was still ignorant of his name. We exchanged courtesies. I racked my brains trying to remember the name of James Durrant.

"You have never heard of me," he said, divining my thought, "how could you? its publication has been delayed so often."

"You must tell me about it," I said as we went up the steps of the hotel. To my surprise he stopped short, saying in a voice of extreme earnestness.

"You mean it?"

"Why, of course," I answered. "What a strange question!"

The faintest flicker of a smile spread over his face. He led the way in, stopping opposite his sitting-room, motioned me to enter.

"You may think so, but it isn't really. It is ten years ago since I first began my novel. You won't believe it, but it is great, it is brilliant. Everyone who has read it thinks the same. How can they help it?"

I murmured something about "Of course," and that it was "very nice of him to allow me." He pointed to a table which was strewn with sheets of paper, covered with a close small writing.

"You write much?" I asked.

"Very little," he answered, "I have other things to do." And then he added, hesitatingly, "I told you I was married, didn't I?"

At the time I didn't see the connection between the two. I doubt if anyone would have, who hadn't, so to speak, got into the skin of James Durrant. It was not surprising when it is remembered that I hardly knew him at all, and that I had no idea at the time what a sensitive instrument he was.

Realising, however, the dangerous ground I was treading, I thought it best not to pursue the subject

further. He held out a typewritten manuscript, in a black paper cover, just as it had come from the office.

"That is it," he said. "Take it away and read it at your leisure."

A sigh escaped him as he handed it to me. I understood, that whatever its worth from the public point of view, he had confided to my care something that was very dear to him—a part of himself.

Murmuring a few words of thanks, I took it up to my bedroom, with an uncertain feeling as to whether I was not going to spend a boring hour or so in the immediate future.

III.

Durrant did not come down to dinner that evening, but although I had nobody to talk to, it was late when I went upstairs to my room. A small log fire burned in the grate, and wrapping myself in a comfortable dressing gown I started writing a long letter, descriptive of my visit. But the words came slowly and I felt the whole thing was a tedious affair, and not worth the trouble. Suddenly I remembered the manuscript, and putting down my writing things, started to light a pipe. I looked at it as it lay on the bed, waiting for the courage to come to me to take it up. Durrant was not the type of man from whom I had ever expected authorship. True he seemed entirely engrossed in himself, but there was no keenness in his face, no mental energy, only a restlessness, an apparent desire to withdraw from contact with others, who did not, and who could never

interest him. Perhaps his world was with the Dead, and the dull light in his eyes may have mirrored the distant reflection of a once burning volcano. "Youth! the playground of a thousand dreams!" had he not said to me, in the voice of one who had grown accustomed to looking backwards. The milestones along the road may have been nothing to him but the burial places of his many ambitions. and with their ghosts he may have kept company throughout his life. So that the happiness that might have met him in after years and perhaps would have lingered for a while, he did not notice, as he was engaged in the task of breathing life into his dead soul, and in trying to force the spirits to turn back with him again.

All this and a great deal more I thought of him, as I sat there that night, wondering all the time what I should say to him in the morning about the manuscript. Within a few feet from my hand, it lay there like an evil omen. But it had to be faced. I took it up and began it.

IV.

Long after the dawn had broken, it slipped from my hand on to the floor. I threw open the window and drank in great draughts of the glorious morning air. A few people hurried across the square intent of marketing, carrying baskets on their arms laden with an odd assortment of fruits and vegetables. But the houses were only beginning to open their shutter-eyes; even the Maria Novella seemed closed, and in the hotel, I knew that I alone was awake.

Sleep had no part with me then, for I had lived through the night.

Yes! I had lived! In the pages of that book, in an old-world town, I had been taken to see people who seemed to have risen before me, immortal. Scarcely had I read more than a few lines, than I realised that I was reading a work altogether out of the ordinary. And as I read on, there were moments when I felt the hot tear that I was powerless to restrain running down my cheek, and at others, I could scarcely prevent laughing out loud at the wit that it contained. The wealth of English at the command of the author was astonishing, and the knack of finding exactly the right word to convey his meaning, prodigious. It literally swarmed with superb descriptive passages, with wit, caustic, or flowing as the characters required. Each phrase was perfectly turned, never a word too much; in short it seemed the work of a consummate genius. This made it all the more annoying to find that somehow or other the last chapter or so had been omitted from the MS. I thought for a moment of going along the corridor to Durrant's room, and groping on his table for it. but it would have been rather a liberty to take with an acquaintance so recently made. There was nothing to be done but to dress and go for a walk, and wait till he came down.

It was certainly an astonishing work for anybody to have produced, and I was amazed when I began to realize that Durrant was the author. When he had spoken of it as a brilliant piece of writing, I had dismissed the statement as nothing more than egotism, and bumptious advertisement. Yet if ever a

criticism was well founded it was his. Brilliant! nothing less! And to think that the lonely little man with his eyes on the carpet and his nervous manner had written it!

V.

All through the morning I waited for Durrant, first impatient, and then annoyed that he never appeared. Several times I went upstairs with the intention of knocking at his room, to beg from him the rest of the Manuscript. But at the critical moment, each time my heart failed me, and I returned disconsolate to the lounge.

About midday I called a vettura—as I was lunching with Mrs. Rowton, the owner of one of the most beautiful villas on the way to Fiesole. She had lived in Florence most of her life, and knew everybody. and a great deal more about them than was necessary for her popularity. Her house was the entrée to Florentine society, and the vestibule to the Italian houses. Many, if they disliked her personally, ate her lunches with all the more credit to themselves. To me she was always delightful and attractive. I enjoy the company of women who enjoy being women themselves. Instinctively I distrust the personality accompanying the unpowdered nose.

We had not met since my last visit to Florence, many months before. She greeted me warmly, giving me a seat next to her at lunch. The conversation grew louder, more general, as the wine went round.

"Why are you so quiet?" said my hostess, lean-

ing towards me so that the others should not overhear.

"Am I? I was thinking of a wonderful book, I read last night. It has haunted me ever since. Its people were not puppets, they were alive."

"I will forgive you then, for forgetting that I am also," she retorted with a little laugh. "What was the title?"

"It has none," I said, "at least none that I know of. It was only typewriten, and unfinished: at any rate the end was missing. It is strange how I came across it. I picked up the author purely by chance in the hotel. He asked me to read it. I took it reluctantly. It is foolish to judge of an author by his personal appearance."

"Is his name Durrant?" she asked with a quick note of exclamation.

"Yes. D'you know him?"

"Of course," she answered. "I've known him for years. I've read his book. You're quite right; it is brilliant. But it will never be published, never even finished."

"Never finished!" I exclaimed. "Why, he's working at it now. At least, I suppose so. I haven't seen him since yesterday. He never came down to breakfast."

"Poor Durrant!" she said in a tone of pity. "Didn't he tell you? He will, when you return the manuscript. You'll do as we have done, all of us who have read it; you'll beg him to force himself to finish it. No! he won't mention any names, he'll only give you an inkling of how he came to write

it, and that some day or other he means, he hopes, to finish it. But the tragedy is—he can't. It's beyond his power. I don't remember when he began it, but it is a long, long time ago, many years in fact. He was a bachelor then, a quiet but agreeable person with an intellect behind his good manners. He came to Florence. I think he was writing some articles for the London press. He met her with me, here at lunch. She was amusing, witty, delightful to look at. By the end of the hors d'œuvres she had interested him; with the coffee he was head and ears in love with her. I watched them, wondering where it would end. We all sat listening, there was no room for other conversation. They were matching, wit against wit, epigram against epigram, eyes sparkling against eyes flashing. He spoke in a low voice, with a wonderful softness of tone, that was rather thrilling to listen to if he wished it. It lingered in the ear like a note struck on the piano. At any rate it thrilled her. Not that she hadn't been thrilled often before! Of course she had, women so beautifully attractive have always hosts of admirers. But these had dazzled her with offers of marriage, money, hosts of jewels, life in lovely places, and living in the most luxurious of ways. Durrant simply was himself. He offered nothing and could offer nothing. She knew that. I told her so before the lunch, though perhaps in not quite such crude language. I just said he was poor. You understand I wanted her to be nice, not to snub him, or to play the fool with him. I was always just a little afraid of her doing either the one or the other with men. She was so typically modern. I'm not sure it is a

good thing for a girl to be moulded in Sussex, and finished in Paris; it sometimes leads to a trivial state of mind before marriage, and the Divorce Court after. With many men it wouldn't have mattered in the least. It would have taken them about a week to get over the whole business, and have cost them a good deal in cocktails—and other women. But with Durrant it was different: any woman with half-an-eye in her head could have seen that. Fully a dozen times during lunch I wished they had never met. I felt it would end all wrong, that is—for him. All the same he surprised me, took my breath away, quite. Ridiculous! wasn't it? as if one ever knew what anyone was like, even after a " chartreuse frappée." It had never occurred to me that he was witty. Cynical—yes! perhaps a little, but not brilliant. Probably he had never been so before. But here, suddenly, he had met his partner, his other half. D'you understand what I'm trying to drive at? He had never responded before to anyone, because till now, nobody had played on the same chords. She had piped, and he perchance had to dance. Not that he was unwilling! Certainly not! Unconsciously his mind had been waiting for this awakening all his life. When it happened the whirl was terrific. I expect he listened amazed at his own utterances, but he could not stop at first, no! not till she had dragged out everything that was uppermost in his soul. Then he grew quiet, relapsed into a half-ashamed silence, and sat with his eyes rivetted on her across the table. But the Durrant we had all known was dead. She had killed it, at their first meeting—at luncheon.

" I'm not exaggerating; from that hour he was a totally different person. She came and stayed with me for a few weeks, and during that time she saw him incessantly. He lunched, dined, went out with her in the morning, and took her to galleries in the afternoon, It was difficult to find out how much she cared for him. If I could have foreseen the end, of course I might have put a stop to it. And yet, how could I? After all, they were neither of them infants. People of twenty-five, or more, should be able to look after themselves. The affair became notorious. Stupid people plagued me with stupid questions: not that they were interested in the answer, or in the individuals, but they wanted to shew they were " au fait " with the doings of a younger generation, who didn't concern them. They became a nuisance. One night I ventured to broach the subject. She was frankness itself. She told me she was afraid to think how much he loved her; afraid of how much she had made him love her! That was what she meant. of course. I told her so, too. She stood to her guns, repeating it, and gave me to understand that his fierce passionate love, in conjunction with his brain-power had attracted her at once, then overwhelmed her, and finally suffocated her. She hankered after many, not one scalp, alone. This was altogether too big an undertaking, too great a responsibility. She realised what he might, what he would probably develop into, under her sublime influence. Something colossal, the biggest thing of his day, a " lion," or if he became commercial, at any rate a member of Parliament. His possibilities were unlimited. Her world would become too se-

rious. He had thrilled her too much! Her thin nature cracked like a shell, and gave way."

"And the end?" I asked, hardly waiting for my hostess to take a sip of her liqueur.

"Oh the end, like all others—crude! It was she who had suggested his turning his talent to something definite. He threw aside his press articles for the time being, and started the novel, the one you've read. He brought the sheets here, nearly every day, and we laughed, and cried over them in turns. Nobody doubted that it would make both his name, and his fortune. If ever a book from its very birth was destined to succeed, it was Durrant's. Not that he cared one way or another for success, in so far as he himself was concerned. It was written simply because she had made him write it. He couldn't help it. From the moment they had met, he had entered on a new existence, become regenerated, if you like. His real, more developed, deeper self had thrown off the shroud that enveloped it, and had sprung into life. For that reason he was anxious. Nobody knew better than he did, how it had come to be written. She alone had called it out from the unexplored depths of his mind, and had bidden him create it. He had fashioned it into being, and poured the breath of his genius into its nostrils, but she was the well of his inspiration. He set her up on a pedestal, and kissed her feet. He built a shrine round her so that he could worship. She realised he had created her Goddess of his mind, and it made her afraid. As far as lay in her power, she broke the image to fragments in a night. Like other women, she wanted to thrill, but not to be thrilled too much herself."

"How did she manage it?"

"How do other women manage it? She simply wrote him as nice a note as possible, saying she felt she wasn't good enough for him. Bunkum! I see that's what you're thinking. You needn't put it into words! I think with you. But women are not very imaginative. Then she left Florence and went back to London, where she spent the summer in watching polo."

"What has become of her. D'you ever see her?"

"Sometimes. She is still unmarried and still delightful. But I can't quite forgive her for preventing the book being finished. It is a loss to the world."

"But why didn't Durrant finish it?" I interrupted impatiently. "The reason seems rather inadequate. He ought to have written other books. Anyhow, there are lots of other girls he could have fallen in love with, with a little trouble."

"Durrant was that 'rara avis' that is only born occasionally in modern times," she answered, "he was a real artist. The cruel directness of that note crushed him, and trampled out the fires in his soul. He sank back quickly into a shadow of the other Durrant we had known. Once the influences had vanished that called him out of himself, there was nothing left, nothing but the ordinary man, striving to recapture the desires, the emotions, the powers that had swayed him once, and that were now lost. It is like a skeleton trying to call to you that it is alive, and succeeding only in jangling its bones."

"You think he is not quite himself then?"

"You mistake me! There is no saner man than James Durrant. You know he comes here every

year, always hoping to get under the influence again. He haunts the same galleries, the same cafés, the same operas; he sits in the same seats by the Arno, always with the fixed belief in his mind that the power of writing with the old brilliance will return to him suddenly. Sometimes he is deceived as to the worth of what he writes now, but not for long. The real mood never comes. He writes on and on, page after page, only to tear up ending after ending as unworthy, inadequate. The pen has lost its cunning. The well has dried up."

"There is still hope," I said. "He told me he was married. Is his wife no help to him?"

"I think that was the reason he married," Mrs. Rowton answered after a pause. "It was another delusion. She read it, and told him he was the cleverest man she had ever met. Probably that was true. Then she married him, and became more interested in children. She's quite nice, but not illuminating. Anyhow she can do nothing for him. She has not the proper atmosphere: too mundane altogether."

"Can't you bring them together again?"

"Durrant, and my friend, you mean? Oh! dear no! She was never really interested in him, beyond the moment. He took her by surprise, and swept her off her feet for a time. She had never met his type before, and didn't understand it. You see, she was superficial, and he couldn't be. There was a gulf fixed between them. Perhaps it is better it should remain so. Poor Durrant! Pathetic! all the same, isn't it?"

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL

MURRAGH told me all about him the last night I dined at his club. I did not know his name at the time, nor do I think that I had ever noticed him, though he was sitting quite close to us smoking. I remember his putting down the evening paper, and crossing to the fireplace to knock out the ashes of his pipe, and receiving at the same time a slight kick from Murragh. Then he went past us, with a nod out into the big hall, to be swallowed up in the street, one of the millions homeward bent at the same hour. I watched him from the balcony amble along, to be finally lost at the corner of Piccadilly. Then I returned to my chair and asked Murragh why he had drawn my attention to him.

"He reminds me of a Chopin nocturne played by Pachmann, that is, his life does. Too delicate to battle in the world. Human! but no struggler."

Years of firm friendship have taught me never to contradict Murragh, or to argue with him. One loses so much by doing so. I merely refilled my pipe, and waited.

"I think I said he was no struggler, and had no desire to be. One of those for whom life exists, but not its fact. I compared him just now to a nocturne played by Pachmann. Perhaps the simile is too far fetched, not accurate. For Colquhoun existence flows on murmuring faintly, to the quiet end, with hardly a break. Pachmann loses himself in the music, he becomes more than any other artist, its

expression. The man is absorbed by it, one forgets the instrument. Colquhoun has been swallowed by life, he has almost forgotten his own existence. Nothing remains for him to contemplate but the nakedness of his own soul."

He drew his chair close to mine, and looking round to find that we were the only occupants of the smoking-room, began in his soft, expressive voice. I have known many men, and listened to them talking, but none compared with Murragh. He alone knew the value of emphasis, he alone knew the secret of using his hands. They were small, beautifully shaped, and he had a habit of raising a finger ever so slightly, that just concentrated your attention for the instant, when he wished to do so. Most of us of course talk only with our mouths, but he talked through his brain and lived in what he said. I only wish that I could recall his words accurately, but even then their force would be lost.

"I knew him years ago, in fact I was at school with him. He did nothing famous there, never even won the larger popularity that is a prelude to success so often in after life. Yet on the whole he was looked up to, I should say, looked upon as a person rather apart from the common herd. If he never learnt the six books of Euclid, it was rather because they had no interest for him, and he made us feel that he knew other things much more worth knowing. He had travelled in France, and Italy, and had made rude copies of the Fra Angelico frescoes in the San Marco Monastery. The "beaks" as we used to call the masters, wondered what he would develop into. Colquhoun never wondered, he was content

to let time decide. Still, he never doubted that sooner or later, some measure of success in the world would be his, perhaps not in a public way, but a success satisfactory to himself. We smiled at his self-confidence, at his vague aspirations, but nobody thought of contradicting him. Most of us knew we would develop along well-recognised lines: Colquhoun, we felt, might become anything.

"It was years after our schooldays, that we met again in a restaurant. I stared at him all through dinner, and he at me. Then I sent him a note, and he came over and we renewed our acquaintance over a bottle of wine. At first, naturally he was diffident, and I learnt little of him. But other meetings followed and the friendship of bygone days was resumed. It was from him that I learnt his history. Was there anything strange in it, differing from other peoples? That you must judge for yourself. It interested me, but then I'm always more interested in people than in politics, or public monuments."

He laughed a little bitter laugh, reviewing in those few seconds as he must have been, his whole life. Few men have ever shunned publicity more than Murragh did, or refused more constantly to make a success at the expense of their principles. I thought of the wonderful plays that lay hidden away in a tin box in his room, not perhaps quite suitable to the theatre, not having the requisite number of words or some other pettifogging defect, but full of real people and their lives. "My children," he called them to a few to whom he occasionally read one; but he could never be induced to offer them to the public.

" They will live happier," he said, " for growing up unmutilated."

I thought, too, of the poem beginning " Ne pleurez plus " that he had written some time ago on hearing of a friend's death : and of the large bed-sitting room in which he lived and worked, with the strangest collection of books piled against the walls, scattered on chairs, on the sofa, in every conceivable place. Only the top of the Bechstein was sacred : nothing was allowed to be there except the photograph of a woman and a bowl of ever fresh flowers. The world for some years had left Murragh alone. His voice broke in on me.

" Yes, Colquhoun's story interested me, especially the point of view of his marriage. She was a singer, quite one of the well-known singers of her time. A soprano, she had sung in all the big opera houses in Europe, and was a great success here, at Covent Garden. I met her in Florence, when she was just becoming famous. A wonderful woman ! if you like the bigger type. She was that, in every sense of the word, physically, as well as mentally. Hundreds of men were in love with her. How could it be otherwise, ' she was so devilish ' handsome ! I use the word on purpose. It expresses her whole character. She was so devilish handsome. Colquhoun adored her. If ever a man worshipped a woman, he worshipped Madame Cadonia—as she called herself. Of course, she was not married; in real life she was merely Mademoiselle Leroux, whose parents kept a little restaurant in the Rue Lamartine, in Paris. She used her brains not only in singing, but in the world. She waited till the right man came along.

the man with enough money to fall back on, and enough emotion to understand her. That at least she required. Colquhoun went one night to the opera. She was singing then, quite a small part. He had never heard her name before, but he saw her, and listened. I've forgotten what the opera was—anyhow it doesn't matter. He sent his card round at the end, but she took no notice. Then he went every night, and had flowers handed up by the ' chef d'orchestre.' Still, she paid him no attention. One of his friends, however, happened to be the musical critique on the *Figaro,* and Colquhoun managed to draw his attention to Marie Cadonia. About the twentieth time he had taken a stall and sent his card round, he wrote across it, ' Look in to-morrow's *Figaro.*' She did, and afterwards accepted his invitation to supper. From the moment he spoke to her, he fell in love, violently. He built up an ideal, round her voice, her personality, her looks. She mused for a time, but at length married him, and incidentally made him the happiest man in the world. Don't think for a moment Colquhoun was a fool: far from it; he realised from the first her depths, her infernal temper, her extravagance, her love of devotion. Bah! do those mean anything to a man in love? Most women possess them, nor are men angels. What an infernal draught there is in this room! "

Murragh rose and pulled the curtains closer. Then he returned to his seat and lighting a cigarette, continued:

" She never gave him much of a time, but all the same he was happy. I shouldn't have been, no more

would you, but you see, only a few of us men are capable of loving anyone in the illimited sense of the world. Perhaps the women we meet are not big enough to draw out the higher qualities that one supposes lie dormant at the bottom of most natures. Anyhow, he loved her right up till the end of time, that is, of her time. He never left her, not for a single day if he could help it. He was unhappy if she went out to lunch, or dinner without him. She had made herself a niche in the temple of his soul. What did it matter if she couldn't live up to it? He was prepared to pretend to himself that she did.

" It must have required an effort at times, at least it appeared so to me, an onlooker. There was never any pretence about her. She was too great for that. She treated him just as a slave, as a child. She taught him that he was very lucky to have married her; that many others had wanted to do the same, and that she had selected him because she felt that among the men, he was the more likely to be constant. Her constancy never entered in the picture, was not to be called into question. He could breakfast with her in the morning, and listen to her singing at night, but the rest of the day was hers, and during it, she was content to be adored from afar. Poor Colquhoun! he was so proud of her! He positively ached with pleasure at being pointed out as the husband of the famous Marie Cadonia. For months he worshipped at her shrine in the full sunlight; then there came a total eclipse.

" It was all so unexpected, so sudden. It sprang from a cloud as small as a man's hand, threatening to obscure him for ever. Had it not been for his

astounding powers of affection it would have done so for a certainty. People who thought he never knew, pitied him, wondering he could be such a blind fool: others who thought he did, imagined he didn't care. They were both wrong. He cared too much, that was all. Calmly considered, it was only natural. She was an artist, and though Colquhoun cared for nothing else but painting, he had never succeeded in forcing himself on the public. He was an astonishment to me, to all his friends, in fact his whole life was nothing but astonishment. Before his marriage he was content to paint a 'Sunset on the Thames,' or a 'Scene on the Sussex Downs' but after—well! she altered all that; altered his thoughts, his views in general. In the process of assimilating part of her largeness of soul, his talent, dormant for so long, for want of energy, erupted, so to speak. He became electrified, a new force was vitalised, created in him, and for a couple of years poured itself out on canvas. He forsook rivers, and turned to imaginative work. His manner was refined, his colouring intense, his drawing sure. He travelled back to the best days of the Renaissance, and gave us a pure, a living, an energetic art. Not many examples of this period are to be found: they were snapped up by the knowing immediately they were painted. They never belonged to this era; they travelled back, as I said, to the period when men painted, not for their living, but because they wished to, because they had something to express worth expressing, beautifully. In a few months he became famous. The tragedy was that it was too late. She had met in the meantime Jean Miradot.

"Of course he owed his success to her! Is it possible to doubt it? The power was there naturally, but there was nothing to force it, to give it life, no ambition. She supplied that, unconsciously, by mere contact. Her own personality was so vivid, so electric, that it dominated everybody who met her. Yet it never overpowered one, never left one limp. When one was with her she forced you to her level: when one left her, one felt a smaller person than before. Probably you have never met anyone like her. She is difficult to describe in words. The same as it is impossible to describe a Leonardo. Should you have had the luck, you will understand.

"Jean Miradot! a name! a memory! He was attractive, nobody could deny that. I have seen few men to touch him as regards looks. But there it ended. He was a second-rate scribbler, writing leaders on a French daily, and the author of a successful 'revue.' You will agree with me, neither require much brains, nothing but a certain bumptious, facile fluency of words. Perhaps she mistook him for a coming dramatist, you never know. Anyhow she fell in love with him, and never having really loved Colquhoun, the sequel was certain. But it took him by surprise, though perhaps he was the only one it did. Being always rather a hermit, he never mixed much in society, and so never had the opportunity of hearing about it all from his friends. He stumbled against the truth quite simply. Colquhoun had gone away for a few days and thinking to give Marie Cadonia a pleasant surprise, arrived home unexpectedly, a couple of days before the scheduled time. He crept up to her room, meaning to burst

in on her with a huge bunch of deep red roses that he had bought. She wasn't there, so he went into his own room. He found it occupied though Marie hadn't mentioned that she intended inviting anyone to stay. Then he went down to the dining-room and found her having a recherché repast with Jean Miradot, whom he had never met before, nor even heard of. Yes! he walked in, with the flowers in his hand: but it wasn't Colquhoun who spoke first: in fact he hardly spoke at all that evening. She did the talking. She upbraided him for breaking in on her! Asked him what he meant by not keeping to his plans, and so upsetting the whole household? What right had he to break his word? why didn't he send a telegram? She liked people to know their own mind! She made no attempt to explain Miradot's presence, never introduced him to her husband till after she had said all she could think of on the subject. Then she rang the bell, introduced Miradot to him as a rising genius, and ordered him the best of everything to eat, and drink—his favourite dishes. Afterwards she went to the piano and sang as she rarely sang in private, sang to him the famous:

'Amor che seppe a te vita serbara.'

Tremendous! don't you think so?

But Colquhoun was no fool. For the moment he was rather knocked off his perch, but he gradually recovered himself. He picked up the bouquet where he had dropped it unpresented, putting the flowers one by one into the cut glass bowl, but all the time he was watching Jean in the mirror. It was easy to read what Miradot was feeling, though not what he was thinking: there were too many antago-

nistic forces about for that. Colquhoun carried on a desultory conversation while he eat, but his palate was not in order, and he drank a great deal more Pommard than usual. When he had finished, he made an excuse that he was tired, and carrying his bag into the spare room, went to bed, leaving them to ponder over the situation downstairs. They started on ' Tosca ' but it didn't go well for Miradot sang atrociously, so Colquhoun told me."

" Hardly surprising ! " I interrupted.

" The next day Marie came down at her usual hour, just before lunch, as if nothing had happened. Colquhoun had spent the whole night and morning, wondering what he should do. By the time the gong rang, he had decided."

" I suppose he left her to Jean."

" Not at all," said Murragh. " He did nothing. I told you he loved her ! He stayed on. If anything he loved her more passionately than ever, because he realised it more acutely, and chided himself in a thousand ways for losing her. Divining her every wish, he anticipated them. If he had given her flowers before, he filled her boudoir now. He hardly ever went out, to return empty-handed. He spent hundreds on her clothes and jewels. He even tried to become friendly with Miradot, and at any rate succeeded in giving others the impression. He became her slave, the slave of a thousand fancies. He literally trembled with joy when she kissed him, or thanked him for some service, with a look of real pleasure in her eyes. Only one thing was changed. He painted no longer. He had lost the power of

conception; no compositions, no ideas surged through his mind, as hitherto. The temple of his art had been closed.

" Yet for months, in fact, all through the winter Miradot lived there, in his, Colquhoun's house, in his very room! Lived there whilst Colquhoun wept in silence. What he thought or felt, no one knows: he was too loyal to utter. Then she died quite suddenly. Miradot married a few months afterwards."

" I can't help feeling Colquhoun was a fool," I said, " horribly weak-minded."

Murragh smiled at me, half in amusement. He evidently expected the remark.

"Not in the least," he said with great emphasis. "It depends on your point of view. To me, he is the strongest-minded man that I have ever met. I have said that he loved her, in the real sense of the word. To have cut himself adrift meant the destruction of all impulse, the annihilation of his complete self, the extinction of his very soul. Perhaps he thought too, that she might grow tired of Miradot, and that the dumb slavery he offered must have its effect. He probably felt that if he shewed her the purest, the most unselfish devotion, that in time he would creep unconsciously into the details of her daily life, that the time might come when she would realise that she could not get on without him. A severe problem for Colquhoun to set himself, to deliberately live down the presence of Miradot, to conquer his outraged desires. How far he would have succeeded, it is impossible to say. There was no time."

" You mean she died so soon afterwards? "

Murragh nodded, and taking another sip of his whisky and soda, resumed.

" Yes, died at the zenith of her fame. She had been singing on a Saturday night to a packed house, which had ' risen ' at her ' Tosca.' It took three cabs to take her flowers home, Colquhoun told me so. He was there, of course, and so was Miradot, as it was her opening performance in the new season. They were going on to supper, but she sent Colquhoun back with the flowers first, while Miradot drove her to the Ritz. It took him some time to arrange them, and when he reached the hotel, they were neither of them to be seen. Something had given her a sort of choking fit, and she had gone to lie down for a few minutes, while it passed. But it came on again, and every cough pumped the blood afresh into her mouth. Miradot had telephoned, but Colquhoun had just left."

Murragh turned away from me, and stopped, looking into the fire. Memories of Marie Cadonia were flowing past him, the memories of dead years. Perhaps he, too, had been swept away by the beauty of her voice, her brilliancy and charm of manner.

" Poor soul," he muttered more than once to himself, while I sat still, waiting for the resumption.

" It must have been a strange scene, that night in her bedroom, as she lay there surrounded by the flowers, homage to her genius. She waved them away, whispered that she wanted to die, simply. For months she had been warned to take no exertion, had been ordered to give up singing, and to lead the quietest of lives, but she thought it better to wear out than to rust out, and had kept the know-

ledge to herself. Miradot sat looking at her, with his legs astride a chair, not knowing quite what to say or do. Colquhoun knelt at the bottom, speechless, helpless in his awful grief. She turned towards him, and though she could hardly speak, stretched out her hand to him. He took it.

"She beckoned to him to come closer. 'Kiss it.'

"He kissed it passionately.

"'You will never love anyone as you love me,' she whispered smiling, with the old light in her eyes.

"Colquhoun could say nothing, he was incapable of uttering a single syllable. Even the word 'never' stuck in his throat. He swallowed and tried again to form it, but it was no good; his mouth was too dry. He told me all this himself. He couldn't feel his own pulse beating in the hand that held hers, which was growing very faint, and seemed to stop while minutes were ticked out by the clock at her side. Whilst he knelt there, he forgot everything, forgot Miradot, felt as if he was acting in some scene in a play. Nothing appeared real, either himself, or Marie lying there on the bed coughing away the last hurried moments of her life. He thought it would come to an end suddenly, that he would wake up, and find he had been dreaming, horribly.

"'I have taught you la grande passion,' she went on, in a broken voice in one of the intervals. 'Think of that—it needs a great woman to do it. No, you will never love anyone but me.'

"Then something broke, another dreadful fit of coughing set in, and she died. Tremendous! Wasn't it! All the same, what she said, was true."

"And Miradot, what became of him?" I asked.

" Oh ! Miradot ! She seemed to pay little attention to him in her last moments. She had done all she could for him during her lifetime. Colquhoun mentioned that he cleared out the next day, and that they had never spoken since the moment of her death. Miradot cared for her, too, but with the ordinary passion as others. Colquhoun's devotion you must agree, was uncommon."

" It was immense," I said. " Has it managed to survive the commonplace ? "

" Not quite in the way you may have been led to expect. He went abroad, and travelled in Italy for two to three years. Ostensibly he was studying pictures, in reality he was unloading the past. He tried to paint again, and for some months worked feverishly. But it was useless, and he realised that for the time being at any rate he had lost his power. He wrote to me, a long rambling letter, setting out in detail his struggles, and the fear that his conception might never return to him. He felt his mind had become a blank, that he had no initiative, and only half-hearted desires.

" I must find something—he wrote—to engross me, to stir my muddy soul up from its very depths, then—and not till then—shall I be able to paint again."

Of course I knew better. His power had gone for ever. It was dead, dead as his poor Marie Cadonia. She had brought it into being, and though she had never wished to extinguish it, nevertheless it had gone out with her. It was unlikely he would meet two such women in a lifetime.

A few months later, he wrote again, adding a postscript that he was going to be married."

" A volcano," I muttered, " is bound to discharge its ashes."

" Her name was Dorothy. Dorothy somebody—I've forgotten who, no matter—at any rate most people called her Dodo. Of course, names count for a great deal in the formation of the character, and it was a mistake on her parents' behalf that she was not christened Dodo, instead of Dorothy. Colquhoun met her on board ship, somewhere off the West India Islands. For the moment, tired of Italy, more than ever depressed at his failure to lose himself successfully in his painting, he had travelled through to Marseilles, and from there to Guadeloupe. It was a pure chance that sent him across the ocean, only the look of the Islands on the atlas, and the exaggerated reports of their beauty in a guide-book. His disenchantment was as rapid as his voyage, and on reaching Antigua, he decided to make for Barbados, and home. On a noisy, log-rolling, dusty, half-passenger cargo steamer, smelling of guano and sugar, he met Dodo en route to Barbados for England. He didn't notice her at first, but her mother had seen him come aboard, and had asked her daughter if she had ever seen anyone before with such a sad expression. Loneliness was written in his face; one had only to look at him to feel that he was one of those that had climbed high up the slopes of Parnassus,—perhaps only in a dream. Dodo watched him with interest before dinner, and noting that he drank hock, instead of iced soda-water, spoke to him after. He was leaning over the rails, watching the disturbed phosphorescent waves rush past, when she came on deck. They were

running by the ill-fated town of St. Pierre in Martinique, with all its dead people lying buried under thirty foot of lava. What could be more natural than that she should speak? She asked him about the awful holocaust. He could tell her nothing, remembering it only vaguely, but he liked the sound of her voice, and was glad to have his thoughts interrupted, connected as they were inevitably with his dead Marie. He fetched her deck chair, sitting beside her in her mother's, who was absorbed in conversation with some utter strangers on the other side of the deck-house. Pulling out the foot-rest he lay with the tips of his fingers together, looking up at the ceiling of sky. She told him where they had been, why they had come out for the voyage, what they thought of each island, and how they longed to be home again, at any rate in a white man's country. She tried to interest him in something and knew she had failed. Colquhoun said nothing—he had nothing to say: all countries were the same to him: but he liked the sound of her gently purring voice. He told me that all the time she was talking, he was wondering how it was that he had lost the power to feel. Nothing roused him, nothing lived in him; passion, hate, religion, all the senses appeared to have died. He thought he would have liked to stop at St. Pierre, to have roamed at night over the dead town and lain face upwards to the stars. If he could have felt himself alone in the great world, with night and God, he thought this sense might return to him, but he required scarcely less than that. He looked through the darkness at Soufrière, showing no sign of life, no smoke, no flame,

not even a reddening in the sky. Like him it had uttered its protest, and had become moody, passive, exhausted.

The mother's voice interrupted his thoughts. She was asking Dodo what had become of her chair. He jumped up, apologising.

" That is St. Pierre over there," he found himself saying. " The people were all wiped out in a few hours. Only one escaped, a condemned criminal awaiting execution. He died of shock a few days afterwards. Ironic, wasn't it? "

She took her seat, and mechanically he sat down by her on the deck, lapsing again into silence. He waited, hoping Dodo would begin talking, so that he could listen without the necessity of making conversation. To his disappointment she said " Goodnight " and went below, while he talked to the mother of a crowd of things that had never interested him before. What is the shouting in the street about? "

" Only the fire-engines," I said, on returning from the window. " Have you a small cigar about you? Thanks ! I'm listening."

" It was not till the next evening that Colquhoun had any opportunity of conversation with Miss Dodo. It was he who spoke this time. He had spent the afternoon on a small pen and ink sketch of Castries harbour, which I think he told me was in St. Lucia—when he noticed she was alone. Feeling a wish to talk to someone for a little, it came into his head to give it to her as an introduction. She was obviously delighted, and they fell into a discussion on art, and Italy. Not that Miss Dodo could draw

a line, or knew anything about pictures, but she said she had been in Italy, and though he felt she could never have appreciated the country properly, a suite at the best hotels had left her with very pleasant memories. So the country became a common bond between them. Through it, he broke his journey at Barbados, and they became engaged on the way home."

"Did he tell her about Marie Cadonia?"

"Of course! How could he help it? It was the uppermost, the engrossing thing in his mind. Miss Dodo thought he had been horribly badly treated, and felt quite ashamed of her own sex. She repeated his story in confidence to her mother, who told her that they must try and brighten him up; so they asked Colquhoun to sit at their table at meals and in return he took them for drives in the Island. Sometimes at night, sitting on the verandah on the hotel, while the mother was looking for a shawl, or something of the sort, he would talk to Dodo about his painting, and how he felt that unless a new, overwhelming interest came into his life, he would never paint again; then she would grow silent for a time, and when she spoke, it would be with a tremble in her voice.

They stayed for some weeks at Barbados, and by the time they embarked Colquhoun had decided to propose to her. Not that he was madly in love, he never deluded himself on that point, nor do I think that he hid anything from Dodo. But he felt life, intolerable as it was to him now, might be very agreeable in the future, as they had so many tastes in common. She had revived his interest in things

human, in himself; he was gambling in living stock! Can you blame him?"

Murragh paused, and smoked hard at the long cigar for some moments, apparently turning over some matter in his mind, in doubt as to whether he should tell me, or no.

"It all depends on the point of view you take. Dodo has adored Colquhoun ever since she first knew him. But her tremendous affection is not backed up by any intellect. She would have made an admirable professor's wife; nobody would be more popular with the undergraduates, and she wouldn't have been expected to take an interest in mathematics, or Greek. Literally, she was miserable if Colquhoun was away for a single day. She always wanted to be with him, to sit in the same room, to watch him at work. At first he used to talk to her about the composition and colouring of intended pictures. He would take her into the studio after breakfast, when, seating her on a sofa, he would discourse volubly whilst making rapid charcoal sketches. At other times he would be all impatience for her opinion of a new cloud effect, or the foreshortened drawing of a woman's hand, and would beg her to consider carefully before answering, as her opinion was of such importance to him. But in time he gave it up."

"Many marry the body, but few the mind!" I ejaculated.

"Adoring him, as she adored him, it blinded her judgment, if she ever possessed any. Everything that he did was good in her eyes, everything that he drew or painted. She liked one better than another,

but loved them all, for he had created them. The truth was, of course, that she was incapable of criticism; she hadn't the brains. She tried all she knew to enter into his life, but never got further than the doorstep. She realised to the full the power that Marie Cadonia had exercised over him, the influence that she had possessed, the future she had built up for him, through her own gifts, her great personality, and knew that Colquhoun looked to her to take her place. She noticed the disappointment that came into his face when she stumbled out some stupid appreciation of the wrong thing in the picture; she noticed also that as time went on he talked to her less and less about his work, and more about purely mundane matters. Sometimes making some witty remark, which amused her immensely, he would add that it wasn't original, that Marie had said it once at a luncheon party. Poor Dodo, who had never thought a witty thing in her life, felt a pang go through her. And once, when he said of her that "she talked in flashes whereas other women only dressed in them," she began to detest the dead Marie more than she had ever disliked any living person. In her own heart Dodo had always hoped that Colquhoun would forget Marie in time; that she, loving him so intensely, would drive out her memory. Why should he remember her? Hadn't she treated him abominably, and made him utterly wretched for years, whereas she was devoting her life to wiping out its sadness, and making him happy? The more she thought about it, the more she determined to combat it. Her mother had taught her to believe that love was the most powerful influence in the

world. She gave him all she was capable of giving. Poor Dodo! It wasn't her fault that she succeeded in destroying Colquhoun altogether."

"Destroying him?" I said. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, destroying him! If she couldn't enter into his life, at any rate she could bring him into hers. It was really an unconscious effort. She rarely left him long; she grudged him the hours in the studio and got into the habit of sitting there while he worked. If he wanted to retire after dinner, to touch up some composition, she went there, too. She resented his dining with his friends, unless she was asked also, not in words, but just by a look, which did not pass unnoticed. It seemed as if she was saying to Colquhoun, 'Your old life has never made you happy; try a new one with me.' I think that was the way that Colquhoun read it, and after struggling for a little he quietly succumbed, just dropped back helplessly into the hopeless days of the interregnum.

After all, what did it matter? He had no fount from which to draw his inspiration, and his desires, and ambitions, had never really revived. For a few months they had disinterred themselves from their graves, and sitting up in their coffins had mocked at him, only to bury themselves the deeper. He realised the vanished power, the delight in struggle, the joy in accomplishment, the bitterness of failure. Yes! He must have realised all this, what he had dreamed of being, what he had become! But it wasn't Dodo's fault; it was Life's who had cheated him out of his just inheritance. Slowly he gave up

his art, at first spending less time in his studio, then going there a few days every week, then hardly at all. He transferred his time to Dodo, who grew happier every week. To her it was a triumph, a veritable conquest. She never understood, Now they are seldom apart. Just once a week Colquhoun comes here to dinner, and as the clock strikes ten he leaves for home; the solitary link with his youth. Dodo, his adoring Dodo, waits for him, with a smile of pleasure, as if he had been away for years. His studio is shut up, that is, the blinds are always down. But I suspect that sometimes he steals in there, and sitting among the milestones of the past, thinks of Jean Miradot, and of his shattered dreams. Dead Marie Cadonia is always with him. I never see him for long, but that he alludes to her in some way. Though life has swallowed him, his personality remains undimmed. Colquhoun was too delicate to battle with the world. He was no struggler."

"And Dodo?"

"A charming woman! I dine with them occasionally. She is immensely happy. She has never understood. Tant pis!"

THE MARINE STORE DEALER

THE MARINE STORE DEALER.

HOW many years ago, is it, since I first knew the little shop in the narrow street with the mysterious sign-board above the door? It is hard to say, years pass so quickly. But I recollect when I was very young I used to pause in front of it, and reading the inscription "C. Bough—Marine Store Dealer," wonder what the words meant. It only boasted of a single window, in which were displayed a medley of articles for sale, an old umbrella, a soiled petticoat, fire-irons, or perhaps a faded and torn impression of some old print. But the legend connected the owner with the sea, the words "Marine Store Dealer" could not be purposeless. Somewhere in the interior, I felt sure, hidden from the view of passers-by, must be windlasses, and the heavy chains that hold ships in the tideway nose up against the stream. I almost fancied I could smell the tar of baulks, and half expected to see the street change to a river and the carts and coaches to ships.

Although, I repeat, it is many years since I first became acquainted with the marine store dealer, yet all the circumstances come back to me with singular clearness. The shop was on the outskirts of London far above the bridges of the Thames. It was not even on the banks of the river, but lay shut off the main streets, hidden away so neatly in a slum, no wandering sailor would ever notice it.

The door was usually half-open, and I could see as I passed an old man sitting in the corner of the fireplace. I call him old, because he was ever so

much older than I was, and wore gold rings in his ears, which to my child-mind was an outward and visible sign of being at least a grand-father. His face looked bronzed and weather-beaten: and as he lay back in his chair with his hands deep in his trouser-pockets, he seemed to me to have come straight out of one of the pages of my story-book.

I always made a pretext when I was in the neighbourhood to pass his shop, which drew me with a strange fascination.

It was the shortest way down to the river, which was not far from our house, by whose banks I spent most of my playtime. Perhaps I may have been a lonely child, but I know I was a happy one, for I loved to sit at the water's edge on a summer's afternoon, or at dusk on an autumn evening, and to watch the red-sail barges making to the distant sea, and to weave a fairy-tale round each. Many I came to know by sight, and could recognise in the distance. Some I named in connection with an imaginary romance, while their captains were imbued with all the virtues of Heaven, or the vices of the other place.

It was on a summer's afternoon that I first made the Marine Store Dealer's acquaintance. I had just turned the corner of the street and was approaching the little window of the shop, when I thought I heard someone shouting.

"Ahoy there!"

I stopped short, hardly daring to move.

"Ahoy there! Can't you hear me. Ahoy!"

Gathering up my courage, I raised the latch, and entered. The room was full of smoke emanating from the logs heaped on the open hearth. On a

chair, gazing into the fire with rapt attention, sat the most beautiful child I had ever seen. Her long auburn hair fell in clusters over her shoulders, almost hiding her face, but leaving just sufficient of her profile visible for me to wonder at. Dressed in brown, she reminded one of Cinderella, except that she was very neat; whilst the fire making the shadows dance upon the wall as the flames shot up and down, made me almost afraid as I stood hesitating, with my hand upon the door.

" Come in sonny ! " he said, " nobody will harm you, shut the door, or you'll let in the sea-fog, that chills the marrow in the bones, and makes the corpses turn over and tuck the earth in on the other side. That's my daughter. Nan, they call 'er." She held out her hand to me : I took it and shook it warmly.

" Older than you," he remarked, as he relighted his pipe from a cinder held between the tongs. " A good lass she is, but a pity she w'arn't a lad, tho' it ain't anyone's fault as far as I knows of."

I was quite a small child in those days, and the chair was very high backed, but I remember tucking my legs on the rung, and the feeling of awe that spread over me as I looked from one to the other.

" I am a boy," I remarked.

The girl shot a quick glance at me, but the old man continued to puff great clouds of smoke, with his eyes directed towards the fire.

" Girls are a necessary in their way," he resumed after a long pause, " same as ships and heaps of other things. A trim smart 'un's all right enough, but to own an ugly bark that can only slop against

the tide, is so much lumber, that'll get yer into trouble sooner or later."

Another silence followed, during which I had time to look about the room and take in some of its peculiarities. Every now and again the old man cleared his throat, and spat with unerring aim far into the back of the fire: while the child merely changed her position to lean her head upon her other hand. To my great delight I perceived above a dresser in a corner of the room, a model of a full rigged ship, with all its sails set. I could not restrain the cry of joy, the discovery drew from me.

"Ah! so you found it, 'ave you!" he said without removing the pipe from his mouth. "Lass! d'you see? he's made a discovery, upon my soul, 'e 'as, he's found the good-ship 'Fair-Wind'."

"Is that her name?" I asked.

"'Fair-Wind' she was christened," he answered, "nigh on thirty years ago, and never a day since has she been laid up in port, never an accident, neither wreck or man overboard."

I looked at the old man with a growing wonder. His face had brightened as he spoke, and had become full of life. His small eyes twinkled and shone with enthusiasm, as he looked over the top of my head towards the model.

"Where's she's bound to, lass, to-day?" he said. "I've not much 'ead for geography."

She turned and looked at me very straight, and I guessed I was expected to keep silent.

"Dingwall," she answered.

"To be sure! Dingwall it is. The wind this morning was N.W. by W. She ought to make a

fair passage, if it don't blow contrary-wise somewhere, and take 'er out of 'er reckoning."

"Where's Dingwall?" I asked.

"Right up North," he replied, "a long, long way away, miles and miles it is, so fur off as if it wern't set firm as a rock in the British Isles, it might be taken for a foreign country. She knows all about it, she learnt its sitertion at school, she'll tell yer. Ask 'er, while I fetches more baccy."

With surprising agility he left his seat, and to my astonishment having first removed his carpet slippers, he disappeared up the wooden staircase with hardly a sound.

"We play this game every day," said the girl turning to me.

"It's a lovely game, isn't it?" I answered.

"It's his game, he invented it," she went on, without so much as deigning to look in my direction, "every morning when he comes down, he goes straight out, and takes the direction of the wind. Then he comes back, and I tell him a town in that direction, as near as I can think of one, and he sets the sails just as if she was sailing straight there."

I suppose that I clapped my hands, or did something of the sort to express my delight at what I know I thought was the most beautiful game in the world. With a real perfect ship there, what adventures one could live through? Pirates! crocodiles! desert-islands to discover, where cocoa-nuts grew as thick as peas in the garden, filled with luscious milk, and which could only be approached by rafts, because of the shallowness of the lagoon in which they lay;

all such ideas, and a hundred others excited my enthusiasm to boiling point.

" Folk," said the girl turning once more to me, " say he's mad. But I know better. It's only he hasn't grown up too much to give up playing games. If he had been born what's called a gentleman, he'd have been an actor. That's all it is."

The stairs creaked ever so slightly as the old man returned.

" Makin' friends together," he said, " that's right. She could tell you stories same as yer read in books, but she won't; she only tells them to me. That's so, ain't it, Nan? What a sailor she'd 'ave made! "

He knocked the logs together with his boot, sending a shower of sparks up the chimney. One disentangling itself from its companions, fell on the girl's lap, lived there for an instant, and then went out.

" Ever been to sea? " he asked.

" No," I said, " but I'm going there next summer. They've promised to take me."

" Who's they? "

" My father and mother," I replied. " They go often. Sometimes too, they go in ships far away to countries."

" Things are changed," he went on, " it's not what it used to be, even in my time. People's afraid of it now. We usen't to be, by God, no! We didn't go out with barrels of oil aboard to chuck away when it started blowin' a bit. We just sat tight, and let it blow its damned worst: bound to get over it, sooner or later."

Just at that moment a woman's voice called to him, loudly and shrilly.

" You'd better go," said the child, " or else she'll be coming down to fetch you."

But the old man took no notice. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe on to the hearth, and drawing a plug of tobacco from his pocket, started to cut it up with his clasp-knife.

" You don't know the sea," he went on, " you never will know it, leastways not as I do. Things 'as changed! Nothing's the same. I was born on it, somewhere off the Cape: prematurely too, she was rolling about, now on 'er 'ead, now standing straight up. That's what I was told, by them that knows: I've no memory of it. But she was a ship built at Greenock of solid oak and teak, not made in a blasted furnace same as a piece of ironmongery. Gawd 'lumme, I can 'ear 'er yards crying now without fretting myself."

The woman's voice from above called again, this time louder and in an angry tone, commanding him to stop his chattering and to go out for the " bitter." With a helpless look at the girl, the old man rose, and laying his hand on my arm, gently put me into the street: not however before he had whispered in my ear, to return another day. And as he went off in the opposite direction, I could hear him muttering to himself " Pity she ain't a boy, pity she ain't. . . ."

II.

As I was attending a day-school close to the Marine Store Dealer, I had many opportunities of spending some time with him in his kitchen. He would lean

out of his door to catch sight of me as I turned the corner, when putting his hands to his mouth, he would shout as loud as he could " Ahoy ! " and as I passed with some friendly greeting, he would often ask me if I would not look in on him on my return. On those occasions he would tell me stories of his adventures, of terrible fights with pirates in the Red Sea, gruesome tales of the remains of cannibal feasts; of thrilling dangers risked in the pursuit of romance; all of them connected with the sea. To him it was a spirit, a being of indescribable beauty, a God of power, majestic and dignified; soothing, or a monster of vengeance, not by chance, but as of set design and purpose. When the wind, howling in at his half open window, would blow the flickering flames of the burning logs up the chimney, sending clouds of smoke into the room, he would mutter to himself that " summat must 'ave upset Himself, and some'un would pay for it."

He never seemed to have any other companion but the child. She rarely spoke in my presence, but sat there an interested listener to all he said: nor do I remember her ever being absent. I never saw the woman upstairs, and I lacked the courage to inquire more particularly about her. But an evening visit invariably terminated the same way; by her shouting to him to go out, and get the supper ale. Just once he spoke to me of her. It was a pouring wet afternoon and I had stopped on my way home, attracted by the firelight glimmering through the window. After one of those silent intervals, a stillness only interrupted by the sounds of the pattering rain outside, he said to me suddenly, pointing at the

girl. "You think she's a good-looking lass?" I nodded my head.

"She ain't as fine as her mother," he went on lowering his tone, "no, not by 'alf-a-'arbour's width. But I'd trust 'er further, nature never intended 'er to be an actress."

I felt this was a slight on a fixed ideal. I had only once been in a theatre, sent in charge of the cook to see some melodrama. I had sat fascinated by the beauty of the leading lady, and had cried copiously during her interview with her lover through the bars of his cell in prison. That night, I had lain awake thinking that in the days to come, that I would marry such a one, and live the heroic life thereafter. So I resented any attack on them.

"But you know actresses are always beautiful and good, aren't they?"

"I wasn't talking about the perfession," he answered. "Women are all actresses, if they wasn't they'd never marry. It's part of their duty to be, and some are good, and some are bad actresses, and the ones that don't cotton to the trade, often get left behind in the race for a 'usband. But she ain't one of them, she ain't got the proper varnish that is wanted, so it's likely that she'll be with 'er old father most of 'is life."

I looked at her, as she leaned as usual with her head upon her hand, and she seemed not to belong to the cottage, or to the old man, or to anyone at all.

"No," he went on, "she won't 'ave the looks of 'er beautiful mother, the same as weedled Josh from his first love an's slowly bringing 'im to the grave."

"Have you had another wife?" I asked, "because if you have, you ought to go to prison for it."

"I said love, not wife, young'un," he answered. "My first love was the sea, and when a man once loves 'er there ain't no other thing in 'is life. But you won't understand that, you've never seen it, or known it, like me. An' she will never know it either, 'cos she ain't of the sex that learns these things. It's 'ard on 'er, it is."

The angry voice upstairs called to him to go out and get the "usual." I think he made a habit of taking no notice of it at the first time of commanding, for he continued.

"Pity she ain't a boy, but it can't be mended. I'd like 'er to 'ave gone on and maybe she'd 'ave risen to be a skipper, or sailed 'er own barque trading down in the Indies, or among some of them foreign Islands. But that can never be now, saving she goes along as a skipper's wife. But it's a pity, allus a pity."

The voice from above becoming more strident, I took my leave and left the old man muttering to himself as he went down the street "Pity she ain't a boy, pity she ain't . . . ."

III.

Schooldays came suddenly on me, and I was removed into the centre of a different existence. New ideas and interests filled my mind, and the memories of younger days faded for the moment. My parents removed from London to the country, and it was not till I had left the Varsity, and was studying for the Bar, that the memory of the old Marine

Store Dealer, and his child, returned to me. The desire to visit the haunts of my childhood came suddenly one night after dinner. It was so strong that defying a drizzling rain, I hailed a cab and went down to Chelsea to begin my search. I grew more and more excited as I approached my destination, feeling as though youth had returned to me, and I, a child once more buoyant with hope, not yet discarded.

But the "Ahoy!" never came; for though I searched every street and every bylane in the vicinity, I failed to discover a trace of the old shop, or of its occupants.

It was years afterwards that I met her again. I had been ill for some months and had been ordered to a watering place in the south. It was an old fashioned town, with a small harbour and a rough grey stone pier. It was just the place where doctors delight to send their patients with nothing to do, but to sit on the end of it, and to die carefully in a gentlemanly way from sheer inanimation, without any vulgar fuss or bustle. But a couple of good hotels had been built because the climate was mild and sunny, and the invalids were many. On the day following my arrival I strolled down to the pier, and sat there reading. The voice of a woman offering flowers for sale, interrupted me. From the very first I was certain it was Nan. But she did not recognise me—I had grown so lined, and bore so many traces of the years that had flown by. I think she must have been very surprised when I seized her hand and shook it warmly, and plied her with a score of questions in as many seconds. And more surprised still,

when I insisted on putting her basket into an antiquated four-wheeler, and driving back to her cottage where we could talk of past events, undisturbed. From her I learnt that both her parents were dead, but they had managed some way or another, to leave her enough to live on. On the death of her mother, the old man had left London, and brought her down to F——, where he had bought the cottage, facing the sea. She had never married, had never wished to perhaps, as she said, recalling the old man's words, because she "hadn't the proper varnish." But I was astounded to learn from her own lips, that he had never been on the sea since the time of his birth off the Cape: nay, he had never even seen it, only dreamed of it all the years he was in London.

But these dreams had become very real to him. And as I looked at the old ship with its sails full-set above the mantelpiece, I thought it was thus with many of us. We spend our hours vaguely, without realising they become days, and the days turn into years. But we live our lives in the Land of Distant Dreams, among the shadows of our Unfulfilled Desires.

THE LAKE

THE LAKE.

"OH yes! we have all to pay the price," said Murragh once to me in the top smoking room of the club, where we so often met to pass an undisturbed evening.

"The only question is, is it worth it? I tell you that at every crisis that comes to one, one must choose deliberately. There is no such thing as chance. One has to pay for one's ambitions, one's desires. The finer souls are those who having made up their mind, calculate the cost, and knowing it, are still content. It may be Hell! literally Hell! but from the ashes arises a nobler conception, a vaster, wider life."

"Some pay very little here," I remarked. "They have all they want, or appear to have. Money! position! influence! What price do these pay? None!"

"Undeveloped souls," Murragh retorted. "Souls in their infancy. Don't misunderstand me. Many advanced souls have these attributes and a host of others besides. I am no democrat. The greater part of the democracy are souls on the lower planes, engulfed in the mud of their narrow lives, their selfish aims, and tyrannical power. People with no inner consciousness, who know no worship, save with the lips: whose powers of feeling are confined to tears.

These do not count! They are still asleep. I am speaking of those who are awake, and have this inner consciousness, and choosing this, or that path are content to pay the price. These learn."

We sat for some time in silence. Crowds of dreamy, indefinite impressions floated through my mind. I saw in fantasy, hosts of men and women, with children at their side, passing me by, the outpourings of the great cities. I saw quaint villages sleeping through their existence, happy in their exclusive solitude: pictures of people under a burning sun in the sand of the desert, far from the corrupting forces of civilisation. Have these learnt their lesson, and from such is any price demanded? Who knows? Perhaps Murragh was right.

"Be sure," he continued, "we have to pay the price, here in this world. I've seen men and women doing it day by day without a murmur; giving up every ounce of love, hope, desire, draining the cup of bitterness to the last dregs. If we had only understood we would have bowed our heads to them in compassion, if in nothing deeper. But we never did: we never do."

"Did you ever come across Gawen Moutray?" Murragh asked me suddenly. "No, I don't suppose you ever did. I met him fishing one year in Ireland. He was a beautiful person to look at, nobody could think otherwise. His face ought to have been his fortune, but it wasn't, it was his undoing. I can't describe him to you, it's quite useless to attempt it, beyond saying that he was like the chiseled statue of some Greek god in a museum, except that he was rather darker than they are supposed to have been.

The first night we were together, he hardly spoke: the second he kept half a dozen of us really amused for hours: the third, he had sunk back again into his reverie. He seemed to have two distinct personalities. I know several like that: the difficulty is to recognise the true, the dominant.

No! Moutray never told me very much of his story—only the beginning; I just picked it up from various people, and from hints he dropped, and pieced it together. It's fairly accurate all the same. Probably thousands of other men have the same experience, but I think his was more intense, because he was more intense than most of us. The power to feel came to him young in life, as a mere boy, through unhappiness. He recognised it, even at school, realised that it meant pain and sorrow over the trivial things that must happen, and that most people would take no notice of. So in the intervals between playing cricket and work, he was thinking out a scheme how to obtain control over his sensibilities. Needless to say he was never popular. He was too distant, too reserved, too refined for the average school boy. He grew to love solitude, and in a school where he was beaten all day long, by the blackguard masters, he used to creep under his bed during the playhours reading 'In Memoriam' and sobbing his heart out. At an early age he was familiar with the poets, Tennyson, Shelley, Walt Whitman, and what he read he felt in the same intense manner, and remembered. His enthusiasm grew for music and especially for painting, and in the night time when the other boys were asleep, he lay in bed, thinking out beautiful pictures that he would draw in the days to come.

He became a solitary soul with just an odd companion and hardly a friend.

It wasn't to be expected that school boys would understand, where his own parents had failed. But all the time he was trying to gain absolute control over himself. It is not an easy thing to do, you don't know how to prepare yourself. Something quite unexpected comes along and upsets all your theories. A woman upset his.

This was after I met him. He had been travelling about the Continent, looking at pictures, copying a figure out of one, a piece of drapery out of another, and at the same time imbibing a good deal of the romance of the middle ages, sufficient at any rate to unfit him more than ever for these practical times. In such a mood, he came back to democratic, plain unromantic London, which he tolerated for a month, endured for two, sickened of in three, and left for Ireland at the end of six. His soul hankered after truth, which he missed in Piccadilly, while he only found vulgarity in the Strand. Then it was that the memory of his own country returned to him, and he thought of the purple-heather mountains of Kerry with their deep blue lakes, and the fuchsia hedges along the roadside. Amid the quiet of the hills, broken only by the sound of the falling rivers he felt that he could develop himself, and learn to know his own soul. Few of us have the courage to do this—I think. Have you?"

Murragh never looked at me, as he asked the question; while I had no desire to interrupt his thoughts, for I was thinking of this same courage that I lacked, and had lacked in so many past years. For a long

time we sat silent, and once the clock on the mantelpiece struck ten, and it seemed to me to wait a year of time between each stroke.

"Courage to know yourself," he continued. "Yes, Gawen faced it. He packed his trunks, and went out to the stillness of the Kerry Mountains to learn the understanding of Nature, and to find how little man is with all his artificial cleverness, compared to it. It cannot speak to the dwellers in towns, to the toilers in mines, for they have desecrated, polluted, stifled its voice. They strive after ambition, wealth, the applause of the interested, forgetting that something lies beyond all this, a little thing, a man's soul. Yes! Gawen went there to find this little thing. He bought a cottage, on the edge of a lake, not very large, hidden among a cluster of pine trees, overshadowed by a high mountain. Along the other shore, ran the road, seventeen Irish miles away from the nearest town. Just by the Cottage, the river ran out into a deep pool, where in the autumn, the spawning salmon lay in the depths, rising half-heartedly at unseen objects on the surface. Then below the pool, a small cascade, more pools and broken water, with tall pines on either side, and rocks that formed eddies for young trout to sport in. While from the latticed windows of his cottage, he could see the remains of ancient water-dwellers, who fearing both man and beasts, sought safety, building their habitations rising from the waters of the lake. There, he settled himself, painting the ever-changing clouds that overhung the mountains, and making endless studies from the peasants. Old Maggie Cavannagh looked after him, a tall, black-eyed woman nearing

fifty, whose husband had been drowned in the same lake within a few months of taking her to wife.

" It was at the meeting of the moon-shadows and the trees," she told him, " that they took him, and never a word to me in the silence of the night, but a cry in my dreams that waked me. An' I tell you," she would say, pointing a long arm towards the broken water, " when the shadows meet again another will be taken. Is it not always so? "

By some it was thought that her mind had become unhinged by her tragedy but I think they were wrong. She was a strange woman, and when I talked to her after it was all over, she told me about the Tuatta De Danaan, believing entirely that it was their fault: that they lured her husband to his death through jealousy. She it was who told me, sitting by the empty bed at night, before the tiny fire, of Dudie and Naisi and King Conehubar of Uladh.

" In the days that went before, did I not miself see the sidhe riding by the round with no coverin' to their heads, an' they themselves on the white horses with the hair streaming out behind. An' he would take no count of the warnin' but went out into the night!"

It was in the beginning of April that he met Moya. He described to me all that happened that night, all that he felt, all that he went through. The impression was so intense that he could paint it in words, accurately without exaggeration: at least so it seemed to me, that he was living through that night again.

I was staying for a few days in the neighbourhood, and walked over the hills to spend the night with

him. It was then that he told me the story sitting with his feet on the stone hearth, and a pipe more often in his fingers than in his mouth. On the night he spoke of it was blowing half a gale, and the wind was coming over the hills, whistling down the valley, driving the rain in gusts in front of it. He had closed the shutters tight to keep out the sound of it, fancying that he heard in it the calling of the Sidhe. The damp turf smoked in the hearth, and he had to keep on using the bellows to make the sparks fly. A sudden furious gust blew out the lamp. The wind increased and the rain driven with renewed strength against the windows, seemed trying to force its way through. In the middle of the gust, he thought he heard a faint knocking at the door. Feeling he must be mistaken, that no one could possibly be out on such a night, he returned to the work of trying to revive the sunken fire. Again he heard it, this time louder, and repeated more than once; he went to the door and opened it. He heard the squelch of someone moving in the mud. The black peak of Caran Tual could hardly be discerned, it had been folded in the darkness, and had become part of the night itself. The rain beat against his face, and a great gust tore the door from his grasp and caused him to stagger backwards a step or two. He could see nothing, could hear no sound, but the wind shrieking in its wild fury. He paused for an instant

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Note—People of the Fairy Hills believed by the countrypeople to journey on the winds. The great Sidhe rode: others went on foot.

wondering if he was not mistaken in thinking the sounds he had heard was someone knocking, and went forward to close it again, when he perceived a woman's figure, leaning exhausted against the lintel. He stood staring amazed at her being there at all. For a moment he doubted if his eyes were not deceiving him, and stood quite still, waiting for her to speak, or vanish. Her face was hidden in the gloom, but he noticed that her hair hung down nearly to her waist, and that her dripping clothes clung about her tall, lithe figure.

"Why don't you say something? Can't you see I'm done?"

He moved mechanically towards her, and taking her arm half dragged her into the cottage to a rocking chair beside the fire, then he returned and putting his weight against the door, closed it, shutting out the wind and driving rain. But he said nothing: all the time he was throwing peat on the fire, and blowing it with the bellows, he was wondering not who she was, but why she had come to him. He didn't believe in chance and he felt his heart thumping, great big thumps, as he had never felt it beat before. He kept his back to her, kneeling in front of the fire, but he knew she had taken off her drenched hat, and had shaken out her hair. But he dared not look round until he had regained control of his startled senses.

"Aren't you going to offer me something to drink. A cup of milk?"

He poured some out from a jug on the dresser, and handed it to her. Her fingers trembled as she took it, and her teeth chattered against the glass so much,

that he had to hold it. Her head fell back against the chair. He knelt beside her, chaffing her cold limp hands. He took them in turn beating them gently with his own: then he pushed her hair back from her forehead, and wiped the rain from her brow, with his handkerchief, fanning her gently with a newspaper, he had picked from the table beside her. He saw her coming back to consciousness and wanted to say something to put her at her ease, but no words formed themselves, so he turned again to the fire, waiting.

"Thanks, I'm all right now! I had better go."

"Where do you come from?"

His voice sounded strange to himself, in fact he hardly recognised it. He dropped the bellows, and turned towards her, sitting clasping his knee with his hands, swaying backwards and forwards gently on the stool. The firelight showed him her face, and he noted that she was far taller than he had first imagined. He could see her eyes, great grey eyes, looking at him with an expression of half amusement, half wonder.

"From across the lake," she said quite simply.

"From the White House by the rock?"

She nodded.

"Then you are Moya! Moya Masserine?"

"And you," she said, "are Gawen Moutray."

"It is the only introduction we shall get to-night," he answered with a little laugh. "You had better have some more milk: by Jove, I forgot the brandy; it can't hurt you!"

He poured a little into a glass and filling it up with milk, brought it to her, sitting down again on

the stool. He watched her as she drank it slowly, thinking that he had never seen anyone so beautiful. He saw defects in the features, noted the eyes were too deep set, the nose a little irregular, but somehow looking at her as a whole, her beauty was undeniable, appealing.

"You live here alone, don't you?" she asked.

"At night. In the daytime, Old Maggie from the cottage over the hill comes to look after me. How did you get here?" he asked after a pause.

"Walked," she said simply.

"On your way back from the Black Valley. It's too far for you in the day."

"How d'you know?"

"I saw you pass early this morning, and wondered where you were going. I was painting by the window," he added, "and noticed your white dress going over the hill among the purple heather. I put you in."

She jumped up from the chair in delight.

"Show it to me!"

He pulled the easel across to the lamp-light.

"What d'you think of it," he asked.

"Delightful," she answered, "but I wouldn't recognise myself. After all it's only my back."

"Some day will you let me paint your portrait?"

"Would you like to?"

"Yes, of course, you know I would!"

"I don't know that that follows. We've never been introduced—properly, that is, have we? I don't know what my father will say, I shall have to ask him if he minds?"

He turned away from her to the fire, wondering what her father would think. Stories had been told him of gaunt, old Masserine, who idolised his only child. She seemed to divine his thoughts.

"He's away in Killorglin to-night," she said, "it's time I went."

For answer he crossed to the door and opened it. It was as if the wind angry at being barred outside, now finding a free entrance, rushed in determined to make the most of it. It promptly blew the light out, and swirling in its race around the cottage, on the lookout for further devilment, diverted the smoke from going up the chimney, sending it with great puffs across the room. The cold rain blew in against his face, running in little streams down his neck. Not a star was to be seen, only great black masses of darkness, being driven across the sky.

He banged the door, and turning towards her struck a match.

"It's impossible," he said, "A dog couldn't find its way across the hill to-night. There's nothing for it. You will have to stay here."

She looked at him wonderingly.

"I might try at any rate, I know the track, I think I could find it blindfolded."

"I won't allow you to," he said. "D'you think anybody should be out on a night like this. Why, even the cattle will have found shelter! What story at all could I tell your father, if I allowed you out in such a storm? Strong men have perished on the hills on these sort of nights and you're only a girl!"

She accepted the situation at once.

"I didn't want really to try. I hate getting wet, and the hills are awfully lonely in the dark. Where am I going to sleep?"

"You can have my room," he answered, "see, it is through there. I'll get you a candle."

He took one from the mantelpiece and lit it. "You will find everything you want there," he said, opening the door. "Sleep well, I shall be here watching."

She took the candle, looking at him full in the face for an instant as she did so.

Then saying "Good-night" she closed the door behind her.

II.

"Ah!" said Murragh to me, on the following night, when we met as usual after dinner. "We were talking about Moutray. I had got so far as telling you how she came to spend the night at his lonely cottage under Caran Tual. Well! Moutray told me himself he didn't sleep much that night. It was hardly to be expected. And with the first streak of dawn he was beside the lake, cooling his vagrant fancies in its cold waters. Nor was he best pleased, when striding back across the heather whistling Rudolfo's song to overtake Old Maggie, whom he could see at a glance was not in her best mood.

"Maggie," he said cheerfully, "I've a visitor at the cottage."

"Was it a night," she answered, "for to go seeking a bride, or to be opening the door mid the rushings of the wind, and they themselves riding by in their loneliness?"

She went on ahead, not so much as looking at him, but muttering to herself in Gaelic, which of course Moutray could not understand.

Sometimes she relapsed into English, and he caught one sentence, astonishing in its truth.

"An' she with no coverin' to her hair!"

"How d'you know that?" he asked.

She paid no attention to the question, remaining silent till they reached the cottage. He watched her set about lighting the turf, and blowing it with her breath into flame. Without a change of expression she took the rugs he had lain on, from the sofa, folding them up, and putting them away in the oak chest.

"She'll be crying for the tay-water, and yourself also."

Moutray started: he had said nothing as to who his visitor was. The storm had passed, leaving the trailers behind. The sun had risen red, and gusts every now and again, blew down through the chimney, sending the smoke in whiffs into the room. But as he looked out of the open door, the hills seemed to him more purple than ever, and the song of the swollen river rushing down, intractable, without beginning, without ending, ceaselessly, to the distant sea, sang as it seemed to him, and to him alone, a song, vaguely beautiful, enticing. For the moment he felt he was standing apart from the world, listening to the chanting of an ethereal being, and the soft whisperings of innumerable voices. A feeling of peace swept through him, a peace that he had never known before, which could never be interrupted again; it was his now! this peace that

he had sought, and at length had found: it was his heritage.

"An' she comin' out o' the night, with no coverin' to her head!"

It was Maggie muttering to herself, as she poured the boiling water on the tea, that destroyed his dream. He turned on her angrily.

"And what if she hadn't? Was is a night to turn a dog from the door! Would I be a man, to have shut it, in the face of a woman, and her left to drown in the darkness of the hills outside?"

"Of course not. And nobody's any the worse for it. I'm going after tea."

It was Moya who spoke. She stood at the bedroom door, holding the remnants of a straw hat in her hand.

"I'm quite dry," she added, laughing, "I took the liberty of putting a match to the turf in your room, and spreading my clothes in front of it. This is the only piece of damaged goods."

He took the hat from her hands. "Poor hat! May I keep it as a memento?" he asked suddenly.

"Maggie wouldn't like it! would you? Come, Maggie," she said, going up to the old woman, and taking her hands in hers, "Don't be cross! you wouldn't have liked to be keening over me this glorious morning, would you, and I'm sure I'd have died of cold and fright if I had to spend the night by the shore of the lake."

"Sit you down, and take your's tay in peace, but it was an ill night for a body to be out walking the hills, and withal the moon-shadows nigh to the trees."

There in the cottage, with the already risen sun casting its first rays across the lake, and fields, Moya sipped her tea, and ate the brown-buttered bread, while Gawen sat opposite, silent, hardly daring to look at her.

"You are dull!" she said, at length.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I was thinking!"

"What of?"

"Of shoes, and ships and sealing-wax," he retorted with a laugh, that sounded horribly unreal.

"Of cabbages and Queens," she added.

"I didn't say Queens," he said, "nor did 'The Aged Man'."

"That was because he was a consummate liar!" she rejoined, "but he was really thinking of Queens —more than one, too!"

"I don't see why you should accuse him of polygamy, there's no evidence of it."

"I don't know either," she answered, "except that he was very old, and had a just appreciation of the other sex."

"Are the two coincident?" Gawen asked.

"Don't think I'm talking about the marriage service," she answered, "or the law or any dull thing like that. I was thinking of what my father calls the law of custom, or the custom of law—I don't know which, but I'm sure it means the same thing, doesn't it?"

"It ought to, but it isn't."

She looked at him gravely.

"I think I will have some more buttered toast before I start home."

" You needn't go yet—it's quite early! There's a lot I want to talk to you about. I haven't begun."

" Begin right at the beginning. Tell me, why are you here, all by yourself in a cottage, away from everyone?"

" I really don't know," he answered, " it is rather odd, now I come to think of it."

" Do, be interesting and tell me! Haven't you a hidden romance somewhere? I won't give it away —even if you've done something dreadful. I don't think you look like a murderer."

He laughed at her assumed gravity

" No!" he said, " I'm nothing in particular, only an artist of an inferior sort. A person, in fact, who like others, unable to obtain notoriety, came here to avoid it. In other words, I am here to be alone in order to—well!—to find out really, what I want to do, to be. To escape from crowds, because I hate them: to escape from people because I don't know them: to escape from my relations because they bore me. By the way, have you any that live in the Cromwell Road?"

" I never heard of it," she said. " It's not in Dublin."

" It couldn't be," he answered. "Cromwell and his Puritans weren't tolerated there. He massacred too many people. It's in dear old London, where they massacre too many ideas."

" I've only been in London for a day," she said, " on the way through to Paris. I was taken to Harrod's in the morning, and to see the statue of Queen Victoria, in the afternoon."

" And which did you prefer?"

" I dont know why the poor dear Queen should be surrounded by water? " she remarked, after a moment's pause.

" Symbolic of the British Empire." he retorted.

" I suppose that's why they put a golden angel on her head," she flashed.

" The balance of power! Surely! "

She folded her napkin. " I can't argue with you, I must go, I have been here much too long already."

" I'll walk home with you," he said. " It will be splendid on the mountains among the purple heather, and we shall see right across to Dingle."

" On second thoughts," she said, " Suppose you do a sketch of me first. D'you know nobody has ever drawn me, or wanted to—yet: at least I don't remember anybody. So you will be the first to try. Shall I sit on the sofa, looking out towards Caran Tual? I'm afraid I can't look languid like Maud Goodman's anæmic women, surrounded by quantities of children of the female sex: far too many for the same father."

Gawen told me that he laughed outright, and that Moya went crimson.

" Oh don't laugh, please! " she said, " I suppose I've said something dreadful. I'm always shocking people. Dad says it's living alone and having no mother to look after me, and make me do the right thing, that I've never had the rough edges of my character ironed out. They are dreadfully rough, aren't they? " she added, in a half serious, half laughing voice, with just a trace of pleading in it.

It's at trivial moments that often whole lives are fashioned. Gawen told me that as she was apolo-

gising by the window with the sunlight playing through her hair, it was then that the knowledge came to him. For the moment he forgot all about the storm, and how she came to be there at all: forgot that he had never seen her before the yesterday night, forgot everything, but that just a gleam of light seemed to shoot through his body, right down into the depths of his soul unreached before. He had forgotten Maggie, and saw nothing in the room but Moya, and the empty place beside her on the couch, and her hand lying idly, toying with the bedraggled hat. He went towards her, meaning to seize it, and to cover it with kisses, for he felt in that moment that the Fate beyond the Fates had touched him on the shoulder and shown at a glance his life. But as he went towards her, old Maggie seemed to rise from the very floor itself and stand threateningly between them.

"Can y're no hear the cry from over the lake? Is it myself alone that can do that? Is it only to them that the stick has been broken on that the wisdom comes! Go back, Gawen Moutray, go back to your paintings, and lave her to sit by the window in the big White House, for it's an ill day for you, it'll be that ye cross the threshold."

And Gawen drew back. In a moment she had shattered all his fancies, blown them to the skies, brought him back to earth, forced him to see the realities, dispersed his dream. Just for an instant his wrath rose within him, but before he found time to give it utterance, his sub-conscious self came to his rescue. She was right. Old Maggie who had spent her life among the wildness of the hills, was teaching him

the lessons of gentleness and gentlemanliness. She was protecting her own sex, preventing him from making a fool of himself. Whatever he thought of this woman, bewitching him unconsciously, as she sat on the sofa, looking out towards the lake, how did he know what she thought of him? If he had done as he felt inclined, and had taken her hand, and covered it with kisses, would she have believed in his protestations? She might have been amused, or angry, and left the cottage never to speak to him again; and if she had done so, could he have wondered? In an instant he saw his folly, and drew back, looking from one to the other in his distress.

It was Moya who spoke first. "Maggie's right," she said, taking up part of the old woman's words. "I'm interfering with your work, I must go. You shall paint me another day."

He could only mutter "When?"

"Oh! some day, there are lots of days before us. You must come up to the house, and meet my father. I shall tell him how you saved my life," she added, "will you allow him to come, Maggie?"

But the old woman had turned back to the fire, and was busy heaping more turf upon it. She appeared to pay no attention to Moya, and never turned to courtsey, as she went to the door.

"I'll see you on the road," said Gawen, taking up his hat.

"No, you must go back to your pictures," said Moya firmly. "I can find my own way home, and I like being alone."

Swinging the ruined hat, she went out, but turning round a few yards away, as he stood watching her,

irresolutely, she cried back to him across the heather "Sometimes!"

"Of course," said Murragh, "it is not to be expected that a young man of Gawen's temperament would be content to let Moya Masserine fade out of his thoughts, with the same suddenness that she had come into them. The whole of that day, and for many days to come his brush lay neglected. He could think of nothing but his strange visitor, longing for nothing but to see her again. Every figure he watched coming barefoot across the hills, he hoped brought him a message, an invitation to the White House beyond the lake. So the days dragged wearily by. He could neither work nor think, nor concentrate his mind on anything.

In the early mornings before the sun was up, and the spring dew lay like clouds of frost upon the mountain side, he would climb the hill, from where he could see the house, lying still asleep, silent, ghostly among the pines. Sometimes he wondered if any of his restlessness was communicated to her, or whether she had forgotten entirely of his existence. He watched the first breezes strike the waters of the lake, in puffs, spreading across the still surface, expanding, and dying as they came.

And every now and again, he saw the placid blue stretch whiten for an instant, as a trout rose to take his morning meal. Day after day he sat there, among the bursting heather, looking for the smoke to rise faintly from the chimneys, and day after day he returned feeling more disconsolate, more utterly alone, than ever.

A month had passed, and no message had reached

him. But it came at last, in a letter brought by the postman, who uncomplaining, walked his fifteen miles a day for a miserable government pittance. It was an invitation to lunch with an apology for not having asked him before, owing to her staying away with friends. Just a short note, a bare invitation, nothing more, without any indication of what he longed to know, not the slightest reference to their previous meeting. Nevertheless he answered it hurriedly, accepting, as the postman passed back in half-an-hour's time, saying that he was overjoyed at the thought of meeting her again; which answer he tore up, and in the same cold strain as hers, wrote that he would come."

"Have I time to finish Gawen's history to-night?"

"Make it," I said, as I handed him my cigar-case. "Let us think we are in Italy, where time is of no consequence to anyone."

"Ireland, not Italy," he rejoined. "The difference," I retorted, "is only a matter of a few miles. The future of both is built up on their romantic past, and time with the gods is the essence of infinity and of no account! But in England, crudely autocratic, with the whole autocracy vested in an impossibly annoying democracy, one cannot eat or drink or even talk in a public place after a certain hour; and in order to irritate the class that pay the taxes, private places are made public places, by law."

He looked at the brand of cigar. "Romeo and Juliet! what a name for a cigar! Think of a Juliet who smoked! an extravagance in absurdity. Nothing is safe now from the lech of the people. A tragedy of the famous, is contrived instantly into

a thinly disguised play, which the public gloat over, and authors and others live on for months. The land is smeared with a veneer of respectability more striking in its hypocrisy, than the open morality of the Court of Leo X. or the days of Rousseau."

Murragh smoked for a few moments in silence, which I, not daring to intrude on, waited to come to its natural end.

"Yes," he said at last, "Gawen went to White House. He left his cottage in the early morning walking to the top of the Black Mountain where he lay among the heather looking down on the lake, smiling the while to himself in delightful anticipation. He was young enough to dream in exquisites.

She was leaning over the gate, as he approached, a small one a few hundred yards down the road, before the lodge is reached. She knew he must come along that way and was waiting for him. Gawen described her dress to me, the hat she wore, but I have forgotten them. I remember only his phrase "that it was the dress of a woman who would have been disappointed if he hadn't turned up." Cryptic, wasn't it? and I have no reason to doubt, poignantly true. In the hall he was introduced to her father, Hugh Masserine, then about sixty, a man who looked still older. He was sitting in front of a huge open turf fire in the hall, wrapped in a cape, his white hair, hanging long, uncut, to his shoulders beneath his skull cap. He made no attempt at rising, but holding out a white delicate hand, thanked Gawen in a voice still rich in its tone and brogue, for befriending his daughter. Gawen had nothing to reply. He had imagined that Moya had told nobody how

and where she had spent that night. But the matter was trivial, that it passed from his mind as quickly as it came. Lunch was announced, and they passed into a wonderful armoured room, with coats of mail, halbards, pikes, broadswords and maces in array upon the walls. A huge Irish wolfhound rose lazily from the hearth, and stretching himself sniffed at his legs.

Gawen was placed at the bottom of a long, bare, polished, refectory table, while Moya sat between them. The conversation quickly turned to painting, and old Masserine pointed out the portraits on the walls of the dining-room, and threatened to take him round the picture gallery afterwards. Listlessly Gawen talked, feeling no interest in what he said, looking whenever he dared, half afraid at Moya. He was thinking all the time of that wonderful night, as she stood half-seen, indefinite, in the doorway. A strange chance truly, that brought her from this house to his cottage. The dessert came and she left the room. A bottle of vintage port, cob-webbed with the cork beside it was put on the table, and his host under its soft influence expanded, and told stories of the real Ireland, the Ireland of his childhood. At ordinary times these would have interested Gawen, but to-day, he was living in his own dreams, into which no man could follow him. Unknowing, he drank his share, impatient to rejoin Moya. Perhaps seeing this, the old man gave him the chance, remaining by himself to enjoy the last wine glass, before lighting his cigar. She, too, was watching for him on the steps leading from the drawing-room window, into the rose-garden

"When men reach the port stage," she said, "they forget the rest of creation."

"On the contrary," he retorted, "they reach the stage of appreciation."

"The stage of contentment, you mean, instead of criticism."

"Appreciation is worth more than criticism," he persisted.

"But the latter endures," she retorted.

He was not in the mood for argument, and let her have her own way to the end of the discussion. Larger thoughts were engrossing his mind: he was wondering what influence she would have on him, on his work. And suddenly, as she talked to him seated on the sun-dial, in the old rose-garden, he knew that he loved her, and with it came the idea of resentment. Resentment that she had thrust herself into his life, was turning him from his set purpose, was interfering with his ambitions, his future. Instantly he resolved to crush it, this idea, that was becoming necessary to him. It would mean his ruin, for he had nothing to offer her: nothing but an empty adoration which in any event was worthless to a woman. To him it might mean a great deal, an ideal to live for, a softening influence, an ecstasy. But what if it died? From his own observation of the loves of his own friends, he knew it did die, perhaps to give place to a saner, more solid affection, but perhaps, to the cold extinguishment of desire, and in aftertime, even to ambition. The possibility of living in intimate relationship, with anyone in the frozen clemency of love, was and always had been a nightmare. To meet at break-

fast, lunch and dinner, the same person, by routine without the wish; to know, to realise that it must be so, was abhorrent to his every idea of existence. No! He must crush it in its infancy, and once more regain dominion of himself.

"I'm going!" he said suddenly.

"Not yet, it's quite early! It will only take you an hour to get home. Besides we haven't arranged when you are to do my portrait."

"I don't think I can paint you," he answered, "I shouldn't make a success of it, not the success I should like, at any rate. You wouldn't be pleased —with the result."

"How can I tell until I have seen it?"

He felt the foolishness of his excuse.

"An artist," he said, looking beyond her to the heather mountains in the distance, "an artist till he has developed himself, should live more or less alone. I have painted nothing, thought of nothing since that night you came to me, but you. It is wrong, but I can't help it! it will do no good to either of us. If saying goodbye, were to cost you anything, I shouldn't have the courage to say it. But as it is, it must be. Goodbye!"

He held out his hand, which she apparently never noticed; then he turned his back on her and went out through the garden gate. Just as he slammed it behind him, she called after him.

"I don't think I am doing anything on Friday, will it suit you? After all, you know, Friday is a day of renunciation!"

III.

A few days after Murragh came round to see me and told me the rest of the story.

"The end," he said, "of the romance I picked up from old Maggie, and from one or two others from whom I made enquiries. It's quite certain I think, and not quite usual. I broke off the other night at the point where Gawen left Moya in the garden. He told Maggie about the luncheon—not all of it, but just the gist, and I think was for the time being sincere, in the determination not to see her again, until he had thoroughly mastered his passion. But all through that week, he did nothing definite. He could not bring himself to paint for more than a few minutes at a time, and then only in a listless, irresolute fashion. It was clear even to old Maggie, that he was thinking only of the lady in the White House, longing for Friday, longing against his will. On the Thursday, he spent nearly all the day sitting in a boat on the lake, pretending to fish, drifting wherever the wind took him, and hardly getting a trout for his trouble. Long after the sun had sunk in the sea south-westward, he was still there, in the misty rain, that was driving across the hills. Maggie wrapped her shawl about her head, and went out to fetch him. She found him pulling leisurely in to the shore, soaked to the skin.

"Is it fittin' for you to be on the lake at this time of evenin'," she asked him, "an' the moon already risin', and bendin' its shadows towards the trees? Come home, Gawen Moutray, an' make for yourself

a place by the turf, an' pay no attention to the callin' from across the waters."

He followed her, dog-like, mute, never speaking. It was dark when she took off his drenched stockings and hung them to the rails above the fire-place. Throwing more turf on the fire, she cooked a brace of fish, and put them on the table, but he hardly touched them, leaving them to put a new canvas on an easel.

"I'm sleepin' here to-night," she said.

He looked at her, replying quietly.

"Are you afraid to go home, with the moon-shadows nigh to the trees?"

"An' it is yourself that has seen them!" she asked in a whisper.

"What of it?" he answered, "I have heard no cry."

She leant across the table looking at him in amazement.

"Man!" she said, "the cry does not come to them listening, but to them that hears! Last night, as I sat by the gorse nigh the bridge, I heard the rushing of the Sidhe, and the clatterin' of the hoofs, and they ridin' by uncovered, on the white horses, an' their hair wavin' in the wind behind their heads. Look you at the moon!"

She drew the curtain aside, and the moonbeams flowed through the narrow window right on to Gawen's face. The rest of the room was in almost darkness. She redrew the curtain, quickly.

"It is I that have forgotten to put oil in the lamp," she said lightly, "and with nothing but the turf fire to light you."

He laughed outright for he knew she had become afraid.

" Omens," he answered, " I am not to be scared by moonbeams. Let the Sidhe ride! Am I not a man? "

He went to the door and looked out towards the pine trees fringing the lake.

" She will come to me," he said more to himself than to Maggie. " She will come, walking across the hills, and she will say to me ' God's peace ' and in my mind I will answer ' where '? "

All this Maggie told me, and more. How Moya came on the following morning, as he had said, and how he waited for her on the threshold, not even going out on the moor to meet her, but holding her hand silently and leading her to a seat by the fire. His restlessness had gone, and he sat by the hearth, hardly able to take his eyes off her face. And then, after a time, while they talked, he wheeled the easel across the room to the window, and sketched in lightning strokes her portrait in charcoal, on coarse brown paper he had pinned across the canvas. This first he destroyed, and then another, and another, till at last he rested.

" Don't destroy that," she said, " it's me! "

" It's no better than your grammar! " he laughed at her.

She took the sketch in her hands, looking at it for some time.

" Am I really as beautiful as that? "

" More beautiful," he said, " but why do you sigh? "

She turned away, and kneeling on the sofa, looked out of the window.

" It isn't true," she said.

He came over to her.

" It is! I think so! I have drawn you as I see you, as you are to me! Does it matter how others think you? "

She made no answer.

He put his hand towards hers, barely touching it.

" Moya," he said, " why did you come to me the other night, across the mountains. Since then I have seen a new Heaven, and a new earth . . . ."

" Don't! " she said quickly, " the old earth is big enough for us as it is, and Heaven must be awfully big, as it contains so many from here already."

He turned away and left her.

" You're right, I can't afford to be serious."

" I'm never serious," she said, " it's too engrossing. Besides, I live in the country, and serious people ought to live in towns, like London or Paris, next door to the House of Commons or in Montmartre. Father's dreadfully serious, but that's because he lives among the gloomy portraits of his dear departed ancestors."

He was at a loss for the correct reply.

" You know Paris then? " was all he could falter.

" I was at school there," and she added, " I'm going there soon—on a visit."

" When? "

" In a few weeks, perhaps sooner, nothing is settled."

He came back to her on the sofa.

"Don't go just yet," he said, "I haven't got accustomed to you—or to being without you. I want you to understand. Most of my life has been spent alone. Nobody has been very much to me, no woman anything. It is difficult to succeed, when it matters to nobody, but yourself. It is my fault. I have purposely avoided people, shunned them in fact, lest they should come into my life, and prevent me from attaining my ends, my ambitions. Besides, I felt their dislike, or thought I felt it, which is the same thing. Then you came, from the clouds, from the mountains, as it were, and in an instant you destroyed the perspective. In the quiet of the night, while you slept in there, in my room, I found out my mistake. And since then, I can think of nothing but you. I see you through the morning mists, and in the shadows of night. I hear you speaking in the wind among the trees, and you whisper to me from the breezes of the lake: All this, the mountains, the rivers, the very flowers that grow wild, or in my garden, mean you to me, or else they have no meaning. Don't go away!"

She looked at him quietly as he spoke, saying softly when he ended.

"Don't you think it's time for me to go?"

"You must stay to lunch!"

"Oh, I couldn't do that! It would never do to leave Dad with the All-knowing ones."

"Who do you mean?"

"His ancestors, of course. We don't know them but they know us. I always called them that since I was a child, when I was dreadfully afraid of them

getting out of their frames and talking to me, like the Whisky advertisement."

"Moya! You're talking just because you don't want to answer what I've told you."

"I'm not, really I'm not! but there's nothing to answer, is there?"

He came up to her and seizing her by the wrist looked into her face with teeth hard set, and an expression of bitterness and pain. But it passed in an instant giving way to a sad smile.

"No, you're right! there's nothing to answer. Nothing to give or to be given. I suppose these few hours don't mean much to you, only a way of passing the time. They mean more than that to me. They have given me the only memory I have to treasure. I shall paint you on that flat, lifeless stretch of canvas, and you will live on it, as you are now and be with me always."

He dropped her hand. She watched him go to the door, and flinging it open, stand looking into the distance across the lake.

"Don't you think it really is time I went?"

"Perhaps," he answered, "it doesn't matter: it's too late now."

"Gawen!"

He turned quickly.

"If—we had not before. No! stay where you are, I can talk to you from there. You make me afraid! Women are always afraid of being loved too passionately. Listen! I don't want to love anybody. I want to be myself, to be free, to learn what I am, what I am likely to become. If I am all that you say I am to you, d'you think I shall be

still, in a few years' time? Oh no! we shall have travelled many roads by then, and perhaps very different ones. That is what frightens me."

She paused, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"Come!" she continued, "can't you be satisfied with the present? I am here with you alone. You can talk to me without interruption; you can see me as often as you like. What more d'you want? Let's enjoy every moment and think of all the serious things we said this morning as a dream. Paint me, if you will—I should love you to! Next time you shall paint me in a large black hat, and a black dress with lots of old Irish lace that belonged to one of the All-knowing. Don't you think I shall look rather nice?"

"You will come again?" he asked as he took her hand.

"Why not?" she answered, "I rather like dreaming."

He worked all day at the canvas, feverishly, hardly touching his food, jumping up between the mouthfuls to put in a shadow here, to lighten it there, and by the evening it began to live. Then, exhausted, he threw himself on the sofa. Late that night when Maggie came to bar the door she found it open. Wondering, she started in search of him across the hill to the lake. There, in the moonlight, she saw him seated on a wall, with his back to her, facing the water. He was muttering to himself and while she watched him he rose, and stretching his arms towards the moon cried out:

"Oh moon and stars, oh Earth and Heaven, hear!

Give me her love—even for a single hour, then ask of me the price. Am I not ready to pay?"

Old Maggie drew back and drawing her shawl round her head crossed herself and stole noiselessly round by the fir trees home.

Murragh knocked the ashes out of his pipe and took a sip from the glass beside him.

"And the price?" I asked.

"Oh yes! the price," he continued. "There is not much to tell. Of course Maggie never knew what happened, she can only surmise. Moya came back, not once but often, and Moutray painted her, as she had offered him, in the black hat and dress, but he never finished it quite. It's in a private collection in Dublin, in Masserine's house, in fact, but I don't fancy it's ever shown to anyone. Perhaps she looks at it now and then, I don't know. Her visits became more frequent to his cottage, and then one evening she came, as she had come that first night, unexpectedly. She was dressed in the same clothes and came across the hill, swinging her old garden hat, by its ribbons. Moutray seemed to have heard her a long way off, for he rushed out to meet her, before she came in sight of the windows. By this time, his love had grown to worship, and she laughed, and teased him as she liked. He resented nothing she said, couldn't resent it, she had absorbed him entirely. It was in the autumn and the dew was heavy on the ground, but the twilight was long. Old Masserine was away. Maggie saw, and remembered something of what passed. Moya was sitting as usual on the sofa, and Moutray every now and again took her hand, kissing it gently or holding it

in his, and leaning his head against it. Sometimes she would run her hand through his curls, talking so low, that Maggie could not hear all that was said. They took no notice of her, as she came in and out of the room, forgetting they were not alone. Once she saw that Moutray had bent over her and had taken her face in his hands and was kissing her lips passionately. At another, he would press back the auburn masses from her forehead, looking wonderingly into her eyes, while she would sit still with face upturned, like some statue of a woman in a trance. Maggie described her to me thus.

" It was just as if she were dead, an' was lookin' out of her shut eyes into the Heavens and understandin' them."

They spoke but little but she heard his voice.

" Won't you come with me? I want you! You are all the world to me! Nothing remains, Moya! "

" Take me, do what you wish with me. But don't ask me to leave here, I can't."

" Yet you love me? "

" Yes, I suppose I do. When I am with you I forget everything, and everybody. I long for your kisses. I want to touch your hands, mine burn so. Is that love? "

" And when you leave me? " he asked.

" Then I am afraid of myself. I feel so indefinite, so vague. Let me go from here, far, far away from you, till I learn to understand myself."

Maggie had opened the kitchen door and was taking in some more turf. But she drew back for she saw that Moutray had folded her in his arms, and that she had kissed him on his lips.

"And I! What is to become of me when you are gone?" she heard him mutter.

Minutes went by, so old Maggie told me, broken only by the sound of their low voices. And while they talked, she crossed herself and muttered prayers for their souls and told her rosary. Then at last she knew that Moya was going for she heard her tell him to fetch her hat.

He opened the door, watching her as she put on her hat and veil. The autumn mist rolled into the cottage. A curlew cried, solitary from among the heather.

"I will see you home."

"No!" she answered, "I want to be alone to think."

She bade him good-night.

"Good-night," he answered, "the stars will watch for you, while I pray."

"To-morrow?"

"Is to-morrow ours?" she answered, "who knows?"

And she went out striding across the heather, by the hill-path, soon to be lost among the mountain mists.

All the next day Gawen waited for her. He could do no work. At every sound he would start, or leave the canvas he was working on, and look out towards the White House. Rain fell incessantly, and the lake was broken by the white foam of waves that curled angrily towards the shore. Dark clouds, with white rifts, wind-blown, drove across the sky. The rocks, spray-splashed, were hidden from sight, and night descended, blotting out the dusk. Inside

the cottage, Gawen sat by the huge turf fire, the smoke of which driven by furious gusts, filled the room, with the dense grayness of the peat fumes. Long he sat smoking, thinking, and at last turned wearily to bed.

The next day was the same, and the next, save that the storm was abating. Rain-clouds drifted across the sky, breaking at intervals, through which glimpses of the sun forced their way.

But she never came. The pathway across the hill remained untrodden, desolate.

Old Maggie watched him.

" An' is herself that you be waitin' on," she said, " till you can find no peace at all, in your own soul? Is it wisdom, that be given to the old alone? An' you but a youth, thinkin' yourself a man, afore you be so intendid. Get to your pictures an' leave the faces o' women out o' your mind. For they be all but the shadows that lead men nowhere! I ha' no patience with you, mooning on a slip o' a girl like she."

He shook his head at Maggie, laughing. And taking up his palette dashed in a background of dark green and black to her portrait. But his mind and thoughts were elsewhere, and he soon threw aside his brushes, impatiently.

The next day, about noon, the postman brought a letter. Old Maggie took it in, noticing the printed inscription " The White House " across the back of the envelope. Gawen tore it open, reading it through from beginning to end, and then let it fall mechanically from his fingers, where it fluttered to the hearth. He sat still, with face grown ashen,

as the heat curled and blackened it, never moving or uttering a sound. Then as if fearing it was about to burst into flame he suddenly snatched it from the embers, and read and re-read it again.

"Is it herself that has written to you?" Maggie asked.

"She has gone!" he said quietly. "Gone to someone whom she has promised to marry a long time ago. She cannot bring herself to break her word."

In the days that followed she tried to comfort him, but without success. He would only mutter to himself incessantly. "She is gone! She was mine for an hour. I am ready to pay the price!"

He does not seem to have doubted that he would be called upon to pay it. He gave up painting altogether, as soon as he had added a few important details to her portrait in the black dress. After that he would sit by the window looking out across the pathway toward the White House.

Old Maggie could hardly rouse him from the silence that had enveloped him. She always slept at the cottage and heard him pacing his room restlessly from end to end, occasionally crying out "She was mine just for an hour!" Day after day he watched the postman, with his bag across his shoulders come along the road, past the end of the lake, in his swinging stride, grasping his rough holly stick. But he never stopped at the cottage. And one night when the autumn leaves had fallen and the first frost of winter lay on the ground, Gawen went out, leaving his dinner untasted; went straight to the border of

the lake. Old Maggie followed, calling to him several times, but he took no notice.

She saw him turn towards the White House, that half-hidden among the trees, looked like some spectre, standing immense, mute, in ghostly silence. Then spreading out his arm, he spoke some words, that she could not hear. From the distance a cry came softly, as if in answer. For an instant she thought it was but the echo of his own voice, coming back to him across the waters. Then her mind awoke, for she knew it was the call of the Sidhe and that they would not call in vain. She watched him, stiff with terror that froze her limbs, rooting her to the spot, watched him go quietly to the edge of the lake into the water, deeper and deeper, and then swim out, further and further, towards the White House, till her eyes could follow him no longer. Then, drawing her shawl about her face, and covering her eyes, she made the sign of the Holy Cross for she saw that the moon-shadows had dipped to the shadows of the trees.

And when she looked again, there was no trace of Gawen Moutray.

A TOUCH OF LIFE

A TOUCH OF LIFE.

SOMEWHERE, deep in my memory, lies the recollection. It came to me to-night, faint at first, but gathering strength in all the details, as I sat, musing, in a cloud of dreams. Past events, which had long since become ghosts of their former selves, moved strangely, quietly, across my thoughts, clanking their chains, calling me back to people, who broidering my path, had flitted past, leaving me alone.

I knew him ever so slightly. We called him Tonso, because he was quite bald in a certain place at the back of his head, "Tonsure" being an awkward word to pronounce. He joined the regiment about four years after me, and was posted as junior subaltern to my Company. I took a fancy to him the first night at mess, where he sat opposite, with his tie all askew, and getting more so, as dinner progressed. But I could see under his quiet manner, lay an infinite perception. If we were looking at him, he was looking at us, calculating our worth. By the time the thin tawny port from the wood had gone round, he had summed us all up, from the colonel downwards.

Perhaps I was wrong when I wrote I knew him ever so slightly. Yet that was the impression he always gave me. Something lurked in his character, far away, distant, something that he himself, perhaps, had hardly grasped, never knew intimately. He scarcely seemed to belong to the world he was

living in, certainly not to our world, composed of the men who had chosen it as their profession. Nature had never intended him to be a soldier; in becoming one, he was merely satisfying the ambitions of his parents. Dimly at first he was conscious of it; but later by degrees, it became a certainty. He was far too intelligent to harbour doubts for long about anything, and he soon realised that real success could never be his in that particular line. It was not so much a question of managing men, but of managing himself. One thing foreign to his nature, was to be practical. It is a far rarer quality than being brave. Tonso was never that, never could be. He was a dreamer, a man of moods, exquisite in their subtlety, attractive. On occasions, he could be witty, and always possessed of an acute sense of humour, he rapidly earned a universal popularity with all ranks. His gaucheries on parade were quickly forgiven. His simple confessions of stupidity, melted even the heart of the stern adjutant. No one could be irate with Tonso for long; he lulled any temper to sleep, and provoked in its place a feeling of being rather ashamed of one's annoyance. He was unusually gifted, his chief talent being that he played the piano delightfully. It struck us spellbound when we heard him, some weeks after he had joined. He wouldn't play the first night; just strummed a few notes, and pronouncing it out of tune, declined to proceed further. Some of the subalterns were annoyed, and called him "a conceited ass," *sotto voce*. To shew his contempt young Lennox thumped out the latest waltz from Daly's, interspersed with the loudest applause, from the noisiest. But Tonso

was not to be drawn by any such crude mechanism. He announced quite simply, he had ordered a piano, which would be delivered shortly, and he would then play to us to our hearts' content in his own quarters; but until then the indisposition of the instrument prevented him. On this point he was adamant, and I took his part. Perhaps from that evening dated our friendship, though to me, as I have said, it had its limitations.

The piano duly arrived, and we assembled in his room after mess, most of us in a mood to sneer. But that only lasted a few minutes; then we understood why he wouldn't play on the other thing. He started with something light, "L'enfant prodigue," I think it was, and then forgetting his audience, played for himself. Without pretending to be a sound critic of music, or even to understand it from an educated point of view, I have enough knowledge to know the difference between good, and indifferent technique. His was superb. The scoffers forgot to light their pipes, sitting amazed on his bed, on the floor, anywhere. The seniors joined us; the bridge-table was forsaken, the colonel sitting on the coal-box. Tonso was oblivious of everything, and everybody, but the thing in front of him, and the rhapsody in his mind. He dived from Chopin into Listz, to Schumann, to Debussy; he played "L'Après Midi d'une Faune," as few I should think have ever played it. He understood it, made it part of himself. One lost the fact of the piano, feeling that the music was pouring out, emanating in some strange manner from himself. When it was over, he rose, nervous, and white, and shutting down the case could not

be persuaded to re-open it. To our adulations, he merely said that he had been "passionately fond of music all his life," that his parents "wanted him to do something," that his father thought a professional musician was the same thing as being a "loafer." So he had joined us—with a tinge of regret.

We all thought he was a great acquisition to the regiment, but as I went upstairs to my room, I felt it astounding that parents should understand so little the bent of character in their own children, and wondered how long he would remain subservient to their wishes.

II.

It became a custom with some of us to collect in Tonso's room after mess, when he played to us, literally speaking, by the hour. Occasionally, he could not be induced to touch the notes, and once or twice when he had begun playing he stopped abruptly, and would not resume. At such times, he seemed to have grown afraid of the music, and turning quite white would leave the room, hurriedly.

"Nerves," he said, in answer to a question of mine one day as to reason, "Nerves, what d'you think?"

"Nothing," I replied, "only I have never known anyone similarly affected."

He looked at me curiously, with an expression of half-belief in his face.

"I thought you guessed!"

"Guessed what?" I asked.

"Oh nothing!" and he instantly changed the subject.

At the time we were quartered in a town in the South of England, and enjoyed a good deal of hospitality from the countryside. Tonso soon became much in request. He was a standing-dish at dinner, and week-end parties, and was lionised by the women all day long, in order to brace him up for the evening's entertainment. Not that half of them cared a jot for any music that Bethoven, or anybody else ever wrote; but he had become the fashion. The men had their sherry and bitters, before dinner, and the women their Tonso after, and they all enjoyed him except one—Lucy Stokes. She was the only daughter of an immensely wealthy widow, who owned the largest house in the district. Her father had died a few years before of heart failure, brought on, it was said, through his confidential clerk disappearing into space, with a couple of hundred pounds of Mr. Stokes', and a Non-conformist minister's daughter. Suffice it, that before he left this planet, Lucy had almost grown up, and was beginning to survey the world from a new point of view. Put shortly, she intended to be decidedly expensive. Her education had not been conducted on pile carpets, with early tea in the morning; on the contrary, the regime had been a cold bath, and French verbs before breakfast. But from an early age she had realised that not many houses had twenty bedrooms, and few had such a collection of the worst examples of the worst Victorian painters. In the long gallery, there were many rivals to the "Black Brunswicker" and "Paddington Station."

Yet she heard them admired, and in fact the whole of the "stucco" furniture admired, by numberless people whom Lucy thought ought to have known better.

One guest, and only one, she had heard differ from the concensus of opinion; and he, after walking the length of the corridor several times, had been overheard to remark to a fellow-guest, that "it was a pity that some people did not recognise, that taste in painting is as necessary as taste in wall-papers."

Naturally, he had never been asked to darken the doors of the Abbey House again, but Lucy, turning the matter over in her thoughtful mind, had formed the conclusion that there was a gist of truth in what he had said.

Whatever the reason, the result was clear. Content with her own position in life, she became a trifle hard in regard to other people. At least she appeared so to me. She was inclined to attack the world from the cushions of her own sofa.

"What a gift to be able to play like Mr. Rawle!" I said to her one Sunday evening at the Abbey, where we had been invited for the week-end.

"A great gift—certainly," she answered laconically.

"Just think," I went on, "of the joy of playing hour after hour, of forgetting all your worries, and and bothers, the world, everything. Think of it."

To my surprise, she answered quickly, vehemently:

"That is just what I dislike in Mr. Rawle. Look at him now, with his eyes shut, dreaming over the piano. Music is all very well, but not when it is

carried to such an extent as this. He makes me feel I want to shake him, to wake him up. He lives in another world; he's out of touch with this. He's a soldier, by profession, at any rate, not a musician: they're a species apart, and of course one never expects anything from them: they're all impossible. But Mr. Rawle is different. You mustn't think, when I say I'd like to shake him, that I mean I don't like him. I do, very much. But if I had anything to do with him, I'd make him come down out of his clouds, down to real things. He's out of touch with life where he is."

Poor Rawle was brought out of his clouds with a vengeance. Lucy Stokes married him a few months after.

III.

By the time that they returned from the honeymoon, the regiment was ordered to Aden, a dreadful place for a woman at any time. Tonso failed to get an exchange, so it caused no surprise when his resignation was received in the orderly-room, and he obtained leave of absence pending its acceptance and gazette.

About the same time I received an appointment at the War Office, and found to my delight that Rawle and his wife had taken a house in Sloane Street. Old associations made me welcome, and rarely a week passed that I did not dine at least once in the tastefully furnished house overlooking the gardens. It did not require any very acute observation to realise that Mrs. Rawle was seriously engaged

in the process of shaking up her husband. He as good as told me so, one night when we were alone in the smoking room.

"It's a great nuisance," he said, "but Lucy doesn't like my playing more than an hour or so a day. I played the greater part of the morning, so I suppose I had better not play now."

"I wonder why?" I asked, feeling a very natural surprise at the prohibition.

"She's very practical," he answered, "that's the bother."

"Ambitious! I suppose you mean," I ejaculated.

"Perhaps yours is the better definition. She wants me to do something active, something that every man does, or wants to do. To stand for Parliament, or the County Council, or at the worst to become a Secretary to a Company, anything, as long as I get before the public. She says that I'm a dreamer, that I want leavening, whatever that means."

"Mixing with the masses," I suggested.

"The worst of it is, that I never feel any of those desires. I want to be left alone. Other people and their affairs don't excite me enough to make me want to give up my own interests in order to talk about theirs. Besides, quite frankly, I have no wish to besmear myself in politics. It's all very well for them to pretend that their one idea is the welfare of the country, but we know better; they're grinding their own axe all the time, and hoping for a statue in a public garden when the climax is reached. We often talk about it, but Lucy doesn't agree."

"I can't see you in Parliament," I said. "You'd be bored to extinction."

"We shall never agree on that point, but I suppose in the end, I shall have to give in. Why the devil people won't let one live quietly if one wants to, I can't think. It's not asking very much of one's relations."

He threw the end of his cigar into the fire, kicking the log viciously, till it sent showers of sparks up the chimney.

"Of course I'm a dreamer. All the time I'm playing I dream, dreadfully, intently too. Shall I tell you something? I've never told anyone but Lucy. I'm sorry I told her now, I ought to have known she wouldn't understand. You remember that at times, I can hardly play a note, that is, intelligibly. You've seen me frequently get up and leave the piano, apparently without a reason. D'you know why? No! I don't suppose you could ever guess. It's because these things are real to me. They exist. I didn't create them, but I played them into my life. I touched the note, the one note that can bring them back to earth. From my earliest days I believed in them, in their conscious reality. I felt for them, as I felt for myself, for others. I was not surprised when they came to me; I had expected it. I had prayed that what I thought was true. Long before they appeared I knew it, by instinct, by conviction, was certain that they would come, that it was only a question of development. I was playing Rubenstein's 'Melody in F.' She, the embodiment of it came to me. I looked up, and found her sitting opposite, leaning back among black and gold cushions, on the purple sofa. Her long, ringless fingers, rested against her cheek, and the

firelight played among the shadows of her auburn hair. She took no notice. I was not in the picture. Her face was not beautiful; it was spoilt by the expression, which was too pained. I did not know why, at the time, and wondered, but I learnt afterwards. It was the fault of my playing."

I had let my cigar out, and was staring at him in astonishment. He met my gaze steadily, but a note of sadness came into his voice when he resumed.

"I'm very sane, though perhaps you don't think so. Horribly sane in fact. So many have come to me since Doria—that's her name, at least it was so before she became a soul. It's all so simple, and beautiful if only you understand it. It was she who whispered it to Rubenstein. I don't mean to say that he learnt the actual melody from her, but that it grew out of a subconscious knowledge of her presence. She loved his thoughts, and was with him always. Doubtless she influenced him in this world in many ways, anyhow she made herself felt; he embodied her character in his song. It is the same with others. Some I am only beginning to dimly apprehend, of others—a few—I have a clear vision. But it makes no matter whether I see them or not, I know, they are there. Their world is peopled as ours, only their souls are more beautiful. The occasions when I cannot play, are when they do not come. Then all the music goes out of me, and my fingers grow cold and stiff. Do you wonder that I dream at the piano? Lucy wants me to give it up altogether. She doesn't understand. How could I give up my friends?"

He relit his cigar, and sat drawing it slowly in.

"Sometimes they come in groups as in Beethoven's fifth symphony. At other times the room fades, and its stiff walls give place to dark woods with patches of sunlit lawn, and carpeted with flowers, through which they move like people in a Watteau picture. When I have finished, they linger, I think, regretfully, then slowly become etherealised. Why d'you sit so still, staring? D'you think I'm mad? If you could meet and watch them as I do, you would know the world to be a much more beautiful place than you ever dreamt of."

I went home that night, convinced in my own mind of Rawle's extreme sanity, but rather disturbed as to the wisdom and result of bringing him out of his clouds.

IV.

A few days later I had an opportunity of hearing Mrs. Rawle's views on the subject. Rawle was dining out, so she selected me as a stopgap. He had not come in when we returned from a music-hall, and it was over a biscuit and some white wine that she expounded her views.

"Tonso's a dear,"—she had caught on to his nickname—" a perfect dear. There's nobody quite like him, nobody half so kind. But one must admit that he's eccentric. It's not his fault, I suppose he was born so, and nobody has tried to check it. That's what I must do. You know about his music, I expect he's told you. When he plays, he thinks he sees ghostly people in the room, who have come to listen to him. Sounds awfully mad, doesn't it? But he's not in the least really. He's quite ordinary,

as sane as you, or I. Of course it's all nonsense, he never sees anything, but the idea must be knocked out of his head somehow or other. He must be brought into touch with real life. That's what I'm trying to do. I tell him that it is lucky for him he married a woman of sound practical sense."

The process of getting him into touch with life was what I feared for Rawle. Because she had whisked him through the marriage ceremony, she expected him to change, not only his life, but his character. She was determined to make him a success, when the poor fellow never wished to be anything of the sort, from a worldly point of view. He only asked to be left alone, and that was the one thing she never had intended to do. It supplied unconsciously the motive for her marriage, the reason for her inducing him to propose. She was so convinced that a future lay before him, and so fearful that he might miss it, unless he was waked, that she decided to become his watchman. Deceiving herself she was determined to hustle him into life for his own sake.

* * *

It was one morning that he came to me, as I sat at breakfast. I saw at once that there was something on his mind, some extraordinary reason for his visit at that hour. I waited for him to begin, knowing I should not have to wait long. The cup of coffee I had offered him remained untasted; he hardly answered the few casual remarks I made. But at last flicking the ash off his cigarette he broke the silence.

"I was improvising the other night," he said. "The same melody had been growing in my mind for years. It is a weird passionate phrase, seeming to grow out of the winds that battle with trees, and cry over lonely moors: the storm that shrieks among the peaks of desolate mountains, the unquiet voices that disturb the peace of valleys. It came to me first, like a sigh, vague and indefinite, changing in expression and rhythm. As time went on it became more concentrated, definite, the embodiment of a soul nearing me. A month ago, it approached. I was playing, after dinner in the dark, with just a couple of lighted candles on the piano. Lucy had gone to bed; she had taken part in a golf competition, and was tired. The door was shut. I heard it coming down the oak staircase, softly along the passage. For a moment it paused at the door, and then the handle turned. I played on, my fingers wandering over the notes, striking weird harmonies. I heard the rustle of skirts, faint at first, but coming towards me, and bringing with them the chill that comes from the other world. She stood by me, and though I dared not open my eyes, I felt a presence.

"What I played, I have no recollection now, but I know it was strangely discordant, a school of music foreign to me. The other figures had faded on her entry! She and I were alone in the room. Then came a sigh, and I felt she had left the piano, and was sitting by the fire, with her back turned to me. The melody had gone out of my improvisation; it had become fierce, combative, desolate. My fingers stiffened. I could not follow my thoughts. The

beauty had gone from them, and in its place was a cold, and cruel foglike atmosphere. A sensation of sinking, slowly sinking into a dark abyss overwhelmed me. I clutched at the piano to prevent my falling, and opening my eyes, looked across the room. I recognised the nape of her neck, the coif of the hair. It was Lucy."

"And then?"

"A feeling of resentment spread over me. It lasted only a moment, just sufficiently long to enable me to realise the reason of my loneliness. She was an intruder. It was she who had chased away my other silent friends. Perhaps they would never come again. I rose hurriedly from the piano, to speak to her, to protest. As I did so, she turned towards me, with an appealing look, in which was concentrated the whole of her desires, the sort of look from a woman that ties the tongue of a man to the roof of his mouth. In the silence, that seemed to last for hours, I felt what she wished to say. She was calling on me to make a supreme sacrifice." He paused for a moment, and then added "yet the odd thing is, that it was Lucy of years ago, younger much than when I knew her first."

He went to the window, and throwing it wide open looked on the wet murky streets. A sudden gust of wind blew the rain in upon his face; he dried it with his handkerchief, and closing the window, returned to me.

"A supreme sacrifice!" I asked, "of what?"

"Of myself entirely. Of all that I am made of. Of the inner life that I alone can live, and that no one can share with me. I was to throw it overboard,

cut myself adrift from it, at once, or never. The moment had come to choose. It was demanded of me to give up what made life a hallowed, and a beautiful thing, from which all my best instincts, my kindest thoughts sprang; to surrender the hours of happiness they brought me; to enter into the world, as most know it, a world in which I felt almost an alien, to force an interest in what has up till now, provided me with little. To become what people call normal."

"And you have decided?"

"To do it, at any rate to try."

"You mean you will give up your music?"

"Yes," Rawle answered slowly. "I will give it up, at least until I know it means nothing to me, but sounds, merely sounds."

"You must find something to take its place," I said. "A man of your temperament cannot be left stranded."

"I shall read the daily papers," he answered with a laugh. "I am told they are immensely entertaining. I shall become interested in something or other—the excavations in Jerusalem, vivisection, or even politics. Who knows? At any rate you must never ask me to play again."

He snatched his hat up, and went out into the cold, driving rain, leaving me sitting, wondering—wondering.

V.

Mrs. Rawle threw aside her furs, and helping herself to a buttery crumpet confided to me that Rawle was cross.

"I don't know what's come over him," she said. "He's grown so irritable lately. I dare hardly speak to him at breakfast. Poor old boy, he doesn't mean to be, I can see him struggling against it the whole time. How difficult you men are! If only women appreciated it before marriage, I don't think there would be so many."

"Only honeymoons," I suggested.

She took no notice of my flippancy.

"I don't know why he's all on edge," she continued. "After all he has a number of the good things in life; a great deal to make him happy. I'm trying to interest him in politics. A few nights ago one of the Whips dined with us. I talked to him after dinner. It was easy to see he was impressed —with Tonso. Yesterday he called. From what he said I feel sure he will offer Tonso a fight. Of course it will be a forlorn hope; all the same it will be splendid, it will get him before the public."

"Is he keen?" I asked.

"He'll become so directly. He won't be able to help himself. I've ordered a lot of daily papers of all shades of opinions for him to read. He quite realises he must do the thing thoroughly."

"Does he read them?"

"Every morning directly after breakfast. He also makes notes for future use. He really is busy now. Somehow I always knew from the first he would be a success, if only he could get someone to push him."

"And you stepped into the gap. You're succeeding splendidly," I said as I handed her the furs. "He will some day realise what a lot he owes you."

" His career will repay my trouble. It's hardly a duty, it's just part of my life. When he has achieved success, it will be glorious, won't it? Good-bye!"

She held out her hand, the hand of a firm, determined character. When she had gone, I threw the windows wide open.

It must have been quite a month after Mrs. Rawle's visit to me, that I saw Rawle. He was dining at the club and came back to my rooms later. A change had come over him, noticeable to anyone who knew him intimately. He had grown haggard, and his voice I thought had dropped a tone, while he spoke listlessly and without interest. It was not until his second brandy and soda, that the Tonso I knew, appeared, burrowing its way up like a streak of light through the heavy darkness that seemed to have descended on him.

" It's odd," he said, as he put his glass down on the floor beside him, " to be consciously leading two separate existences. The one an adopted life, so vigorous and strong that it threatens to strangle the real, to kill it. I suppose it is possible. Perhaps that is what is meant by the phrase 'To lose your own soul.' I don't know, what d'you think?"

" I'm not sure I quite follow your meaning," I said.

Without taking any notice of my remark, he continued, apparently talking more to himself than to me.

" The dreadful part of the whole business is, that I hate her. I can't help it, there it is. God knows, I've struggled hard enough against the thought. She

never foresaw what she was doing, nor did I for that matter. How could one! it's preposterous! nobody would believe in such a possibility. All the same it's happening. Have you another cigar? I feel inclined to smoke to-night. In fact I feel more myself than I have done for weeks."

He lit it, lying back in the chair for some minutes before continuing.

"It came about gradually, quite naturally, one might say. I think I told you that I had promised Lucy to give up playing for a bit. I couldn't keep my promise, and I told her so. She was very angry, you know why, so we made a compromise. I agreed only to play in the evenings, never for more than a couple of hours, and to stand for Parliament, if she could get me the offer of a seat. She did. But I refused it. How could I accept? I was never intended for that sort of life. She and her friend were furious at the time, but they're getting over it. He often dines at home."

"You would have been utterly unsuited."

"Perhaps I always saw beyond the Lucy you know, and that I know to speak to; saw if you can follow me, the etherealised sub-conscious Lucy, and fell in love with it, not recognising the distinction. At any rate, I do so now. At first when I had visualised her I thought she had chased away the others, but I was wrong. They are there all the time, only her radiance obscures them, throws them into shadow. That may be of course because they are not so intimate with me, because I have voluntarily attached myself to another. It took me a long time to understand what I've told you in a few moments,

but there's no doubt whatever about it. She comes to me every time that I play, and sits listening. I am beginning to perceive her radiance. It has a wonderful effect on me, this state of 'voyance.' So many things I thought hideous before, are made beautiful—traits in people's characters, buildings I should have passed unnoticed, even dead things, trees and withered flowers. Then my appreciation is becoming more balanced, truer. I see emphatically that nothing that is bad can possibly be beautiful. Once you can grasp this truth life doesn't present quite the same problems to you, does it?"

"Temptation is eliminated."

"Certainly. What is hideous cannot attract. I know the real Lucy now. That is just the horrible part of it."

I looked at him, with a slight shudder. He returned my gaze quite quietly.

"Don't!"

I intended to stop him. After all, Lucy was a friend of mine. He guessed what I had left unsaid.

"You shudder at my laying her character bare. Never mind, you won't believe me. What I am going to tell you will sound like a fairy-story. Anyhow you can judge for yourself. I want to talk it over with somebody; there is no one, but you.

"It was one night at dinner that I began to notice the difference in Lucy. The only light on the table came from the shaded candles. She was talking enthusiastically about my standing for Parliament before I had told her of my resolution. As I looked at her across the table, I realised something different in her expression, something gone from it. In the

succeeding days I watched her closely. Undoubtedly she was slowly altering, in fact, had altered. An expression of fierce desire had come into her face, which had grown thinner, more intense. A few nights after this, I learnt the reason. I was reading some dull, stupid novel, when I fell into a doze. Lucy was writing at a table close by. In my unconscious state, I felt I was sinking, down through the earth—the sort of sensation one feels when taking ether. Suddenly it stopped, and I found I was on the edge of a cliff, alone. I said to myself 'This is Death' and I felt a terrible pain passing through me. I realised that it was life leaving the body, and that I must fight against it. I willed that I should live, I did not want to die. Minutes, like hours and days passed in the struggle. How it happened I don't know, but I awoke with a cry. Lucy was still sitting by me, but she had stopped writing; she was looking at me. Then I understood. It was she who was dragging life out of me. She it was who was destroying my individuality, losing which, a soul is utterly lost. She was determined to force her nature, her desires, and her ambitions on me, to overplant my will with hers, to make my spirit merely pendant upon her own. The well of her vitality was not sufficient to keep her soul alive: she was unconsciously sapping the existence of another. Where have you hidden the brandy?"

I handed him the decanter.

"What had Lucy lost?" I asked.

"The Lucy of her youth. The ideals, the desires, the ambitions, the love, all these traits had long ago left Lucy Rawle, but they remain with the Lucy I

had visualised, the real Lucy, as God intended her to be. This part of our souls cannot be killed nor has it any place with the ugly part of our natures. Whether it exists in us or lives apart, depends on ourselves. Certain it is that we return to it, as surely as flowers spring from seed, and as surely return to seed again."

He sat for a moment silent, and I for my part said nothing. A long time afterwards I let him out into the night.

VI.

Weeks passed and I never saw Tonso, nor indeed did I meet Mrs. Rawle. I called there once or twice, but they were either out, or had told the maid to say so. I was therefore rather surprised to get a telegram from him one morning, saying he would call on me that evening. Needless to say I wired at once to him to come. His curious story had left a strange impression on me, and I was anxious to obtain from him some further details.

He came into the room and I saw at once an alarming change in his appearance. He seemed to have shrunk to nothing, and his clothes hung limply about his body. The effort of walking upstairs had put him out of breath, and I noticed a marked bluish look about his face, strongly suggesting a rather precarious state of health. His natural nervousness had increased tremendously, in fact I saw that the breaking point would soon be reached.

"No, I'm not very fit," he said in answer to the usual platitude, "but I shall be better I expect very

shortly. Lucy thinks of dragging me off to the continent, and 'pon my soul, I'm rather anxious to go. She thinks that it would set me up again. You know of course I've given up all idea of Parliament. I couldn't stick it, making oneself cheap to a lot of timeservers. But I've got to interest myself in the new scheme for Territorials, as soon as we get back. She says it may lead to great things; anyhow it's to keep me in touch with life."

"Where are you off to?"

"Italy, I think," he replied. "I'd rather go there than anywhere else. It's easier to get away from the mob. Lucy rather wants to go to New York and live in a skyscraping hotel for a season. I don't fancy it. America is altogether too electric for me. I like something that has reached its age decently."

"I shall advise her to take you to Italy," I said, "but you ought to go to a good doctor and go where he advises."

"I don't think it matters very much," he said. "I'll go wherever she wants me to. She's still struggling," he added with a laugh.

"And you?"

"Oh gracious no! I'm content. I hardly recognise her now, even her voice seems strange. But my Lucy—the visualised one I mean—becomes more beautiful every day. It isn't necessary to play to call her. She never leaves me for long. I've learnt to communicate with her quite as freely as I am talking to you now. Speech belongs entirely to here."

He paused for a moment, drawing his coat about him. I threw another log on the fire.

" It's rather beautiful to think that soon I shall join her again. Not as she has grown up, but the true unstained living self, that first attracted me. I daren't tell Lucy about it, she wouldn't understand. She's grown so much into this world, that she has lost all link with the one before, which of course is the same as the one after. I must go now. I want to play, to improvise. I feel the mood upon me."

He went out singing softly to himself the Mussetta song from " La Bohème."

* * *

It did not surprise me very much when I heard that Tonso had been found dead in his study. He had been playing the night before, and when the sound of the music stopped, it was supposed that he had gone up to his room. In the morning he was discovered lying across the keyboard, quite dead. At first they hardly recognised him; his face had lost all the lines, the weary look had gone from it, and an expression of intense rapture had taken its place. The features had become beautiful again, like a Greuze-child.

It appeared that death had been instantaneous, following a heart-attack; at least that was the opinion of the specialist who examined him.

I, alone, knew better.

Rawle had been called over the horizon to meet again the real Lucy.

THE PLAYTHING OF THE HOUR

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I.

MADEMOISELLE Raymonde lay still in her bed staring up at the ceiling, while a thousand thoughts flashed through her mind. She was very ill, and had lain there month after month, always expecting to be up and about in a few days. The doctor, a small man with a short, neatly trimmed black beard, had held the same opinion at first, and came only about twice a week, and laughed and joked with her and told her anecdotes about his patients, and in particular about the Minister of Agriculture, Monsieur Poiret, and his red flabby wife, who always boasted how much happier she was at St. Valerie milking cows in a farmyard than trussed up in tight clothes trying to persuade the Parisians she had a figure when she knew it was all anyhow. But of late the anecdotes became fewer and his visits more frequent; and last night when he came he was very grave and he talked for a long time on the landing to her maid Rosaline though she could not catch a word that passed between them. She thought she would ask her what he said; but it was an effort to reach the bell-rope, and in a few minutes the maid would come in to take away the untasted breakfast. Her thin pale hand lying motionless on the bed clothes attracted her attention. It seemed asleep. Many had held it in theirs and praised its beauty, and bathed it with their warm kisses; she recalled them one by one by name; The pale pink chiffon falling from the sleeve faintly

enveloping the wrist seemed to be adding its caresses also. And then she thought of herself, as she was some years ago, very young indeed. The little village in Normandy came back to her, and she saw herself, a girl just out of her teens, dressed all in white after making her first communion, and remembered how her dear Curé, patting her head, looking kindly at her, had said " Ah ! Raymonde, if the Bon Dieu will help you to be only half as good as he has made you beautiful, you will grow up very near the saints of Blessed Memory." Yes ! she had been very beautiful, but she had never been at all near the saints.

The wind driving the rain remorselessly against her window recalled her to herself. For weeks she had been lying listening to the patter of the people in the street—the shouted snatches of conversation, the cries of the " marchands " and the deep booming clock in the belfry close by sounding out the hour. From near, and far away across the river, the other clocks would take it up as if jealous of the first to beat it out : and three times in every night when she could not sleep for difficulty in finding breath, an old chanticleer cooped up in some narrow yard would join the fray, and crow his loudest to his own delight. With a short swift pang, she recalled that with the exception of Rosaline and the little doctor, she had conversed to nobody for weeks. When first her illness became known, one or two of her " intimes " had called to enquire, and left a bunch of flowers; and others had sent her boxes of sweets tied with broad bows of blue and pink ribbon : and some had never cared as much as that. But for weeks

she had been alone: nobody came near her, she was forgotten, she had never been more than a cypher to anyone. A frantic longing seized possession of her, a desire to be loved for herself, for her companionship. Not altogether a new wish, but she had never felt it so intensely before, never with such bitter regret. What if it never came to her at all? would her end be like this!—lying alone, staring up at the whitewashed ceiling, straining her ears to catch the street sounds growing fainter and fainter? A great fear came upon her. She saw herself old and wrinkled with sharp lines about her face, and deep hollows under her eyes. She fancied she would become embonpoint, and women passing her in the street would shudder wondering how anyone could become so ugly.

She turned on her pillow and pressed the electric button.

"Rosaline," she said when her maid appeared, "help me into my dressing-gown. I want to get up."

"Ah Madame! you must lie quite still. The doctor only said so again this morning."

"Just for one moment, I must."

Rosaline, knowing full well that arguments and protests would be of no avail, if her mistress had once made up her mind, took the pale-blue silk dressing-gown from the sofa and putting an arm round her helped her into a sitting position, and poked her tiny feet into the soft bedroom slippers to match. Even that effort, small as it was, caused her breathing to quicken, sending a pink flush to her cheeks. Rosaline felt the quiver run through

the delicate frame, and hurriedly piling up the arm-chair with cushions in front of the fire, carried her just as if she had been a child across the room.

"How long have you been with me, Rosaline?" she asked after a moment's pause.

"Six years, mademoiselle!"

"You were a child when you came first?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"In six years have you forgotten to tell the truth?"

"No, mademoiselle, in six years I have learnt it."

Rosaline loved her mistress. She knew her faults, her weaknesses, her sins, but she knew that under all, down in the depths of her nature, lay one of the tenderest of hearts. All through these six years she had been happy, safe, protected, and if Mademoiselle did not lead quite the sort of life she had been brought up to look on as the ideal, who was she to criticise the habits of one who had shewn her such kindness and such consideration? God had not made her attractive, given her the beauty of Mademoiselle, moulded her hands and form, chiselled her features to such perfection that people stared at her in the streets, and glanced at her in the cafés, or invented pretexts to speak. No! they passed her without so much as a glance, and on the whole she was glad. But to Madame he had thrown all these temptations in her way, and if her mistress had fallen a few times it was rather the fault of the Bondieu for trying her so severely, not her own. Nor was she quite sure it was a sin to love too much, she thought it probably would be accounted only a little weakness. It is not altogether good for the soul to be too beautiful.

"You will tell me the truth?"

"Yes, Madame—always—have I not?"

"Look at me—come closer, child."

Rosaline knelt at her feet, a little timid, a little afraid.

"Am I dying?"

She spoke so simply and so naturally, as if the question was on an everyday affair, and as though she was quite indifferent to the answer.

"You are very very ill," Rosaline answered, and then in an outburst of real emotion she clasped the thin hands within her own and covered them with kisses.

"You must not die! I cannot let you! you will get better!" she sobbed. But Madame answered nothing, but sat still and motionless looking into the fire.

"Bring me my mirror, the large one," she said at length.

Rosaline rose and dragged it across the room adjusting it at the proper angle.

"I will ring when I want you."

Left alone, she lay back in the chair critically scanning her features. Yes, it was true, she was dying, in fact would soon be dead. She recognised the immense change that had come over her in the last few weeks. The hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, the shrivelled throat all spoke one message. There was no mistaking it. She had never up till now thought much about death and what it meant. It always appeared so unreal, so vague and far-off that it had scarcely entered into her calculations. She had looked forward to a long period of old age

with all its attendant disadvantages, loss of health, beauty, and a host of emotions as the close of her existence to be postponed as long as possible. As to the aftermath—she would think about it then and try and learn something from those, who like herself, knew nothing but taught many things.

So she was going to die! Dimly she wondered why it did not excite her more? She had always heard that people felt terrified and died in screams, shrieking aloud for mercy, at least so she had been taught from the pulpit. But she only felt a sense of calm, a feeling of losing interest in life.

Her mind naturally reverted to Rosaline. Poor little child, how she would miss her! the only one! What would become of her? She must be provided for, enough to secure her a good husband. Rosaline ought to be married, she was quite plain. Who else should she leave her fortune to? Many names and faces flashed through her mind. Young men doubtless grown up, boys with scarcely a hair on their chin; men with hardly a hair on their head. But how many of these would she like to see again? Ah!—perhaps one, only one out of all the sea of faces memory shewed her.

An idea came to her. She rang the little bell by her side, and telling Rosaline to bring some note-paper dictated a short letter. Of this, eleven copies were made on pink scented paper with a monogram in gold in the corner, and put into eleven pink envelopes, and despatched to the post.

But the twelfth she wrote herself on a leaf torn from a diary, and put it in a plain envelope, sealing it carefully, and addressing it in a clear pointed hand,

kissed the name once, then putting it beside her she closed her eyes and slept.

II.

The sun was shining through Mademoiselle Raymonde's windows right on to her bed. She was feeling very ill, and all her energy had faded away. She was now content and indeed wished for nothing else, but to lie still in bed and think between the doses. And while she lay there, listening to the noise of voices and the clatter of hoofs on the street-cobbles, she noticed the myriads of golden specks that made the sunbeam, and it recalled to her mind the old-time legend of the Holy Grail, and she thought that the knights were not a very saintly lot at all, and wondered in what manner the Grail was fashioned.

The burr of the electric-bell brought her mind back from the æsthetic to modernity, with all the crude culture of civilisation. Then she remembered that to-day she was to hold a reception—perhaps her last. Only a half of those to whom she had written had answered; as to the others, perhaps her letter had never reached, anyhow, it didn't matter. Her hand wandered under the soft pillow, and she pulled out a crumpled answer, from the only person she cared for in the whole of her little world and read and re-read it again.

Rosaline came to her bedside and shook up the pillows, straightening the little lace cap and from

under which a curl peeped in half-shamedness at its own daring.

"The gentlemen are downstairs, Mademoiselle," said Rosaline, "whom would Mademoiselle like to see first?"

"All! I will see them all at the same time."

"But Madame is not strong enough!—it will do Madame no good."

"Is Monsieur Gaston there?"

"Yes."

"What is he doing? is he talking to the others?"

"No, Madame! when I went in just now he was standing apart by the window; the others were sipping the best cognac and laughing; they had a joke between them, but I did not hear it."

Mademoiselle lay back again on the pillows, waiting while Rosaline went to fetch her guests. She closed her eyes, and heard the sudden sound of voices as Rosaline opened the door of the room below, and then the tramp of feet coming up the stairs: and then—

They stood by her bed, presenting flowers, asking her how she was, and telling her how sorry they were she was ill; they had only just heard, and how they hoped in a few days she would be out and about again. Monsieur Flocquet, bending over the bottom rail clasping his fat hands together, thought he would like to take her for a drive in his automobile in the Bois, and would call for her any day she liked; while Monsieur Bondeau who kept putting on and taking off his pince-nez, thought that a change to the country would do her good and offered her the use of a room in his farm-house for as long as she

wished. He would like to have taken her there himself, but unfortunately pressure of business kept him in town, but all the same it was at her disposal just for the sake of old times. Then not to be outdone the others joined in, offering her suppers, dinners, boxes at the opera, and a host of other pleasures; and finally they became so excited and so loquacious that beginning to pay compliments to each other, they ended by an all-round invitation to dinner, that very night at the Café Riche, so as to drink the health of Mademoiselle Raymonde, and arranged there and then to have a most recherché dinner with "homard morny" and champagne "bien sucré," and in talking of it forgot the reason why they had come, and the deathly pale face lying on the white pillow in front of them. But Monsieur Gaston stood apart, with his back turned to them, looking out of the window along the avenue of chestnut-trees converging to a point in the distance, and at the whiteness of their blossom in the sunlight.

Mademoiselle Raymonde lying there with her eyes closed, listened to all they said. She remembered the first time she met each of them, how different they seemed then? Flocquet had not become coarse and fat, on the contrary his hands were thin, and he played the piano delightfully. Ah! those evenings when he would take her back to his flat after supper and play Schumann, with such feeling and expression that an exquisite melancholy would steal over them both, that she had to turn away her head to prevent him noticing the tears, that had gathered in her eyes and had begun to trickle down her face. She couldn't sing very much, her voice

at its best being thin and tremulous, but he would insist on her trying and would pinch-her-arms ever so nicely till she sang, while he, improvising, followed her words

"En vé rité je vous le dis
Ne pleurez plus le paradis
Perdue par Eve
Car il existe sous les vieux
Un endroit plus chic et moins vieux
Comme on en reve!"

Sometimes she was made to stand on a table and recite, while Flocquet and his friends marched round her, blowing penny whistles and tin trumpets, and making a dreadful din of discords; and after it was over and they had drunk her health, she would be assisted down as if she were a Queen getting off her throne, and would rush out of the room into her own little flat at the top, where, throwing herself on the bed, she would cry, and cry, and cry, just because she had been made to do something she didn't wish to, and also because she wanted some one to care for her very, very much, and though they all liked her a great deal no doubt, nobody adored her, as she wanted to be adored, not by a multitude—by one! only by one!

Ah! those days never, never to come again!

It was on such an evening, that she had met Gaston. She was standing on the table trying to sing

"Pierrot a passé la trentaine
C'est un penseur qui ne rit point
Qui ne court plus la pretentaine
Depuis qu'il a de l'embonpoint."

But her voice was more toneless than ever, and the improvisation was a failure, so much so that the others jeered at Flocquet who became very cross and threatened her with such pains and penalties, including banishment from the flat, that she sank to her knees and wept. Then someone lifted her off the table, and she felt herself carried like a child up the stairs, into her flat and deposited—flump—on her bed. She hardly dared to open her eyes even then, but when she did, it was Gaston she saw, tall, big, strong, handsome Gaston, sitting astride a chair, with the black stump of a cigar between his teeth, watching her. They talked long into the night, and she made three brews at least of black coffee, while he blew great rings of smoke through his nostrils and talked to her of people she had never heard of, Schopenhauer, Kant and Ibsen; of places she had never seen, Venice, and dreary London, where nobody is allowed to remain in a restaurant after midnight, and where all the shops are shut on Sunday, because the English think it is very wrong to enjoy themselves on the seventh day of the week, which should be made a day of unremitted gloom.

But he told her Flocquet was an ass, and that his improvisations were horrible.

How clearly the following Sunday came back to her. They had gone to St. Cloud by boat, the first of many such excursions. The fair was on, and she remembered how they had laughed at the people tied into seats on the inside of a barrel, which was then rolled down a wooden staging a hundred yards long. Ugh! how sick they were! not a bad way perhaps for medicine to be taken by the young,

Then at night, after dinner in the gardens, they had walked part of the way along the river bank on the road home; she had wondered why he hadn't kissed her, for the stars were shining clearly and the moon was very bright, with the wind rustling softly in the trees; she couldn't understand his coldness at all, for she thought it usual that every man would want to kiss the woman he was talking with on such a night as this. She had glanced up at his huge form and black shaggy head as he strode along beside her, and fell to wondering if he would ever take her in his arms again. Then she remembered how she had dropped the others suddenly and refused to go any more to Flocquet's flat, and had gone to Church for many Sundays on end, and made her confession, and not minded in the least the gibes of her old friends as she passed them on the staircase. It was not so much that she wished to become good, but that she felt being good and being happy meant the same, and now that she had learnt to love Gaston she found it impossible to be happy with anyone else. It is so simple to be good sometimes.

Days and nights had followed each other, all of them happy, many studded with purple moments. And then in an instant, just as she had learnt to love life in a wild ecstasy, the fairyland she had fashioned for herself out of the dreams had melted like a flake of snow.

Ah! those days never, never to come again!

How well she recalled her wild anguish when Gaston first deserted her, how she had wept and prayed and cursed by turns. He had told her simply and quietly he had fallen in love with a lady,

and he had added "a real lady, tu comprends, ma petite."

But tears were of no avail, nothing would alter his determination to leave her, and when losing final control of her grief-torn mind she had poured out a torrent of invective of which she never meant a single word, he had quite quietly taken his hat off the head of a caste of a Venus where it always hung, and gone out silently into the street.

Only a few hours after, she, too, had followed him out into the world to search for drugs to stifle thoughts, to conquer feelings.

She sat up in bed and looked at her old friends. "You—all of you," she said, "what do you offer me? Money! pleasures! amusement! Take them back, I don't want them! Look at me! Have any of you cared for me, loved me beyond the minute? When I am dead, shall I be remembered with joy, or with regret? Will you remember me at all? Will any of you each year put flowers on my tomb? No! I have been nothing to you, nothing beyond the plaything of the hour, a toy to throw aside, to be sometime or other put by on a shelf. Go now, quickly! leave me! it's not your fault: we, all of us, have our toys long after we're grown-ups; but I'm no use, I'm done for, I've been broken by you children!"

Mademoiselle lay back and laughed so loudly and so long, and coughed and choked so much that Rosaline came rushing in and hurried them away. Then Gaston turned round from the window for the first time, and came over and sat on her bed beside her, taking her thin hand in his. All that she had

been thinking seemed to have passed through his mind, for he said as he heaped the pillows round her and kissed her very gently " I must send you into the country, mon petit jouet, to get well, for I am all alone, and we must play together again some day soon. Will you? "

THE OPTIMIST

THE OPTIMIST

IT was twenty years ago that I joined the circuit, and began at once to do the weary round of sessions hoping for a chance prosecution to come my way.

We were full of ambition, all we younger men, longing to match ourselves against our elders and criticising them with a subdued deference we were far from feeling: secretly, we fancied a little practice would turn us into a Brougham, a chance would discover us to be a Russell, and we looked forward confidently to the day when our table would be covered with briefs and our clients falling over each other in the passage waiting admittance. That others had failed was nothing to us: we knew why and could lay our fingers on his faults—some were too verbose, muddle-headed, dull, could never hold a jury for five minutes, and such like, all satisfactory reasons to us at any rate. Others were fools like old Priddell and could never have hoped to succeed in anything. His proper sphere would have been selling brooms from a travelling caravan, or at the best addressing a country congregation of yokels in a black gown from a pulpit. But the Bar was no place for him, and we pondered on the intellectual capacity of those responsible for the direction of his education.

Poor Priddell, I'm afraid he was only one of many. I first came across him in the robing-room at B——, a town in the North of England which held its ses-

sions four times a year, and considered it was behaving handsomely in dealing out an odd dozen "soup" briefs at a guinea apiece among the two-dozen barristers who regularly attended.

Priddell was then a man of forty, and as one of the many seniors invariably was handed one of these small prosecutions. His face would fill with enthusiasm when this happened and he would wander away to the far table and there make copious notes, much to the quiet amusement of us juniors.

My first brief was delivered in this way and Priddell came up and congratulated me. "Work at it, boy," he said, "learn it off by heart; you can never know too much about it."

"It's a plea of guilty," I answered with a laugh "and so there's nothing to learn and nothing to say."

"You never know," he said. "Work, work, and success will come your way in time."

I sat next him at mess that night, where under the influence of a good dinner and unstinted wine he expanded his ideas.

"You don't believe the advice I gave you this morning," he continued, picking up the conversation just where he had left off. "But I've seen it, and I've seen the results. Nothing is trivial in one's profession, nothing too small for whole-hearted application. You may laugh and think I'm a fool, but I know what I'm talking about and I'm right. You never knew Russell, he was a fellow pupil of mine, and he worked! by God he slaved, there's no other word for it!"

It was one of his secret joys to recall he had served his apprenticeship with the great man, and

his hand used to tremble and his eyes glisten when he recalled those early days together.

"He got his success, and no man can say he didn't deserve it. His was genius, that's what it was, nothing less. We aren't all like him, but some measure of it will come to you and me, if we only stick to it long enough."

Frankly, he bored us all with this eternal cry. But at the moment I knew nothing about him and went into Court on the following day on purpose to hear him.

At this distance of time, I haven't a notion what the case was about. But I remember wondering when his "opening" would end: verbose, styleless, he brought out every detail in full, reciting every fact he was about to prove at wearying length. He never once referred to his brief, hardly paused, knew every word of it by heart, and ended by annoying the judge, the jury, and everybody else in Court.

"Priddell on his legs," we whispered to each other as we filed out to the robing-room, "heaps of time for lunch and dinner, both."

His practice did not grow, solicitors were afraid of employing him before testy judges.

"I can't make out why he's ever briefed," someone would remark, "unless he's got an ugly daughter on the shelf."

We chaffed him unmercifully, but he took it good naturedly. We didn't know whether it hurt his feelings, and we shouldn't have minded if it did: we were all of us fighting one against the other, and

we were pleased to have something to vent our wit on.

For some reason he took an odd fancy to me, and frequently used to join me walking down from the courts to my hotel. Nothing would induce him to come in, no promise of a drink, no hope of a cigar! He never asked me to his rooms, in fact, though I learnt he was a bachelor, that was all I could gather about his history. At the corner by the gilded King's statue he would stop, and shaking an ugly, thick, work-stained forefinger would say "Success will come to you and me if we only work and wait," and with that parting admonition he would turn down the street muttering to himself without so much as looking back.

II.

Time went on, and though I can't honestly say I carried out his advice, success came to me in a limited measure. I no longer saw myself following in the footsteps of the great, but on the other hand I was enjoying a small but steadily increasing practice. Sessions had not been sufficiently lucrative to attract me for some time and deciding to abandon them altogether I attended once more for the last time telling Priddell I was giving them up. His own practice had equally steadily diminished: but he shook me by the hand warmly as if I had already achieved great fame, remarking how glad he was I had taken his advice. But I noticed a tear come into his eye as he spoke, and I felt he was wondering, as I had wondered in bygone years of others,

why the elusive fairy had not touched him also on the shoulder with her golden wand.

"I shall miss you," he said, his voice shewing a note of sincerity. "I've not much in common with most of them: but we shall meet at times and I'm the last to grudge you your success, all the more seeing that my advice helped you to it and knowing as I do it will come my way in the end." He hugged his guinea brief and went into court. I followed for I felt I must listen to him for the last time, he was so much part and parcel of what was leaving behind. Age and starving ambition had dulled his intellect, at no time of the brightest: his verbosity had increased: whatever style he had once possessed had altogether faded and he stood before the court repeating his instructions parrot-like, and still at great length. It was the picture of a man without individuality, seemingly characterless, without shape: a talking machine, mechanical, verbose, uttering phrases now grandiloquent, now pedantic, in the same monotonous and lifeless voice. I hurriedly left the court with a lump in my throat and a sense of gloomy sadness around me.

"That old fool Priddell's on," said a newly fledged barrister to me in the passage. "A hopeless rotter, can't make out why he doesn't chuck it, only fit to address a jury of matrons in an asylum."

I smoked a cigarette and unrobing wandered into the street. I watched Priddell come down the steps, and fancied in the distance I could see his lips moving and muttering to himself as he went along "Success will come to me if I only work and wait."

III.

It was years afterwards that it happened, though not very long ago. I had ceased to attend even the assizes regularly, for having taken silk, I was kept fairly busy in London.

But it so happened that a case of special importance called me to B—— and I at once thought of Priddell and made enquiries. Nothing had been seen of him for months, he had not turned up at sessions of late: nobody knew where he lived: even the "soups" had been taken from him, he had become so incompetent. I determined to search him out and sent my clerk to the Post Office to make enquiries and found to my astonishment a man of that name was living in the slum quarter of the town.

Fearing his sensitiveness I sent him a note saying I was coming to see him unless I heard from him. The reply came at once, a few words on a greasy piece of paper, written by someone else, that if I wanted to see him I had better make haste.

Never shall I forget the utter squalor of the street. Dirty four-storeyed houses, with herds of ill-clad children sitting on the doorsteps; others played with the mud in the gutter, patting it into castles with a broken shovel.

Coarse women with bare arms and throats stood at their doors gossiping with neighbours whilst disreputable-looking men in filthy tattered garments lounged idly in groups praising the State insurance

and cursing with hideous oaths the House of Lords and all the cultured classes.

With a hope that I had mistaken the street I knocked at the door of the number indicated in the message and it was opened at once by a big woman, with her sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and her arms covered with soapsuds.

Yes! this was his home; he was expecting me; the doctor was with him, would I go up?

I stepped into the kitchen and bedroom all in one, and up a narrow wooden staircase, so dimly lighted, that I could scarcely see the steps.

His room was at the top, so dark that when I entered for an instant I could see nothing. Gradually it all came to me: the window with a piece of brown cloth nailed across the upper half to take the place of glass: a couple of cane chairs, a wooden table in the centre heaped up with papers, old briefs, and dusty law-books: a washing-stand with one leg missing propped up against the wall with an empty packing-case: in the corner an old Chinese screen with holes through several panels, and on an iron bed I saw the emaciated form of my poor friend gasping for breath.

"He's going," whispered the doctor to me; "he's past us already."

The candle spluttered in its socket, and he took another from the mantelpiece and lit it. Outside in the street some wandering musician was squeaking out the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" on a fiddle at the door of a public-house. The dying man turned in his bed, and whispered:

"Lift me up."

I went to him, putting my arms round him, while the doctor humped his gown which served as his pillow at his back.

A faint smile shewed he recognised me; his lips moved and I bent my head to catch his words

"Work . . . work . . . success . . . will come . . . "

Perhaps it did at last.

THE BRUTE

THE BRUTE.

I.

FOR months he had been expecting the crisis and now it had rushed upon him with a sudden brutality. He could hardly feel resentful for he had gone more than half way to meet it; in fact had nursed, cherished and brought it up: indeed, it was a child of his own creation. Nevertheless the suddenness of the attack for the moment overwhelmed him. Though he had seen it coming for months, he had taken no positive steps to encounter it, to resist it, in any way. He was sure that in fact he had no desire to resist it, but he hated fusses. Nothing was so repugnant to his finer senses than drawing-room melodrama. It was always useless, vulgar, embittering. He leant his arms on the breakfast table, wearily, looking across at his vis-a-vis.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You know I wouldn't hurt you, if I could prevent it. It seems ridiculous to say so, but I'm awfully fond of you, much more than you ever think—more than you can ever know."

"Thank you! Only fond of me!" she replied bitterly, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders.

"You will never understand, Sophie," he replied in a quiet voice.

"God knows I understand enough already!" she retorted.

Antony Sloane pushed his plate a few inches away and looked at his wife across the table. He wished to assure himself that she was not crying, for if there was one thing in the world that he hated, it

was tears. Tears upset his equilibrium, and made him say things that he felt even at the time were not quite true. They were the symbol of pain, and pain to him was ugly, abhorrent. Even as a boy he had always refused to kill things, since he heard the squeak of a rabbit and saw it struggling out of its burrow with the ferret hanging on to its bleeding throat. He had been laughed at, and even cursed by his friends for being a soft-hearted fool, but he took no notice. The shooting parties were things of the past: he had only been to a few, and the slaughter of beautiful birds had sickened him. It might be necessary, possibly was, but not necessary for him to take part in; there were plenty to take his place. Yet now he was causing pain to his own wife, possibly pain irremediable, ineradicable, and he felt himself powerless to prevent it.

Years ago, when he had married her, he had never considered this a possibility. How it all came back to him from the first: he had gone very reluctantly to a dance at the house of some dull friends of his, and had met Sophie Blessington. She had not attracted him at once, and though he had danced several times with her, it was simply because none of his usual dancing partners had turned up. Somehow she had given him the impression of being "déclassée," as if she oughtn't to have been one of the party. The idea came to him from nowhere, on account of nothing he observed. He had asked his hostess who she was, and where she came from, who had agreeably answered him, but added "From Babylonian Suburbia," which left him musing as to whether she meant Finchley or Wimbledon.

John Blessington, "old" Blessington as he was called by his familiars, had spent the whole of his life as a clerk in the Colonial Office, where, after a long period of grinding servitude, he had imbibed sufficient officialism to become a chief clerk in one of the departments, from which exalted position he directed many of the affairs of countries he had never seen. With his superiors he was extremely popular: it was felt that he could be safely entrusted with the task of keeping the Colonial officials quiet, by vague promises, he knew unlikely to be realised. It was recognised, too, that he had an unbounded faith in the Office, as an Institution. If anyone questioned its methods, he looked upon it as a personal affront. Departments might make mistakes, but not the Institution, once it set itself to work. He looked upon it with the faith a child has in the simple Deity of the nursery. He never questioned its wisdom, and the idea of any changes in its attitude, in its regime, to him would have been little short of blasphemy. His religion received a rude shock, when endeavouring to pacify a young administrator of an island utterly unimportant to the rest of the world, who was asking for extra leave, he added in the refusal that he hoped he did not think him unsympathetic. The retort "I did not expect to find sympathy in Downing Street any more than virtue in Piccadilly" left him wondering if it could really be true. He had bowed so many out of that room, bowed them out unquestioning, as he knew to a life, loathesome, horrible, depraved in the tropical colonies. But this was none of his business, the Institution had to go on; it was the pedestal of the Empire, and the

Empire required people to be sacrificed to their greatness. Most of these young men never returned, or if they did, came back as skeletons of their forgotten selves. With a black bitterness in their heart they called to see him, and he bowed them once more into the armchair, and in due course bowed them out, with another promise. A great Institution! so subtle, so capable in its dealings. How cunningly it handled its officials! Once in the net they could rarely escape from the toils: they were never paid sufficient to allow them to save, and few lived long enough to enjoy the miserable pension after their work had come to an end. If their constitution survived the ordeal, their grumbles were stifled for ever, by the bestowal of some Order of the Empire, that cost the country exactly two pounds seven shillings and sixpence—as useless practically, as a punched railway ticket. As for himself he had never received any recompense beyond his pay, never desired any. Each morning as he turned the corner of Westminster Bridge and the grey stone buildings came into sight, he had said to himself "I am part of the Institution!" flushing at the very thought. Yes! He formed part of it, part of the great scheme to get every ounce out of everybody, to drain to the very dregs for the benefit of the country, the bodies, brains and souls of his fellow men. Never before had he looked upon it in that light, he had only regarded himself as a pillar of the Institution. He had brought up his family to regard him from the same point of view, as part of a national concern. The hardships which he and his wife had undergone in the early days had been tempered by the knowledge that he was

giving himself body and soul, to the Service. He could count the times he had been late at the Office, during thirty years, on the fingers of his hands: they were "red-letter" days and religiously recorded in his diaries. In due course he had moved as he was advanced in the Office, from Balham to Turnham Green, and then at last settled down in the vicinity of Westbourne Grove. His eldest son Geoffrey, was in the army, and his youngest daughter Sophie married to a man, able to support her without slaving out his life in a profession. These blessings had accrued to him because he was part of the government of the country, of the Grand Institution! He had never hoped for such happiness in the early days of his career.

"Sympathy in Downing Street, indeed!" he exclaimed to the empty room. "Why, it is just one mass of it."

* * *

Antony looked at the distant product of the Institution.

"You think it doesn't matter to me," he said, "but it does. Don't you think I have fought against the idea, from the very first. D'you suppose I gave up my ideals, my beliefs easily? Bah! how little you know, or understand!"

He waited for her to answer but she remained silent. He listened to the monotonous ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, and fell to wondering if the seconds were not too long. He left his chair, and going slowly to the mantelpiece, resting his arms on it, with his back to her, continued.

"It was unfortunate you found out about Aleen. I never meant you to; I did all I could to hide it from you. You oughtn't to have read that letter."

Still she remained silent.

"It was addressed to me. I never interfere with yours."

She opened her mouth as if to speak, framed some words, but shut it suddenly with a vicious snap.

"Yet I was not afraid. You must know I was not that."

"You were not afraid to hurt me!" she answered bitterly. "I never accused you of that. You only thought of her—of this woman."

The tone of contempt in which she said this, stung him. He turned quickly.

"Don't blame her, it had nothing to do with her. What fault there is, is mine. It was I who followed up our meeting. I who insisted on them. I never thought it would end like this. I couldn't have helped it if I had. D'you think either of us wanted it? Was I anxious to ruin my own life and hers, least of all yours!"

"You might have thought of this before."

He left his place at the mantelpiece, and crossed wearily to the window. It was a gray London day, with no rain. He watched the taxis going past with a sullen interest wondering if the occupants were as unhappy as he was. Yet none of it was his fault. It had all happened so suddenly. He had met Aleen Montagu quite casually, and had walked home with her from a mutual friend's house. For some moments they had stood on the doorstep talking, having suddenly found a topic they delighted in—

Italy. She recalled to his memory the Cathedral at Montepalciano, with the Bartoli picture of the "Death Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin," which led to him asking if she had read Addington Symmond's delightful description of his visit, and promising to send her the volume. It had taken her a long time to produce her latchkey from the depths of her reticule that night: and he had enjoyed the sense of feeling perfectly alone, as the hall door shut behind her, leaving him to trudge home, hours after the last 'bus had stopped. He recalled how on letting himself in quite an hour later, he had taken off his shoes in the hall, and crept quietly to his own room anxious not to disturb his wife—or the current of his own thoughts. Since then the last 'bus had always stopped when he left Aleen.

The noise of a moving teacup brought him back to the room in which he was standing. Without shifting his position he looked at his wife. "I am a brute, and I ought to feel it—but I don't," he said to himself, and his thoughts wandered without rhyme or reason to the strange life of Arthur Rimbaud, and to Paul Verlaine.

"*Dans le viex parc solitaire et glacé*
Deux formes ont tout a l'heure passé.

* * *

Se souvient-il de notre extase ancienne?
Pourquoi voulez-vous donc qu'il s'en souvienne?"

She paused with her hand on the door:

"Tony," she said, in a voice bereft of feeling, cold and passionless. "What are you going to do?"

"To do? What can I?" he answered.

"You don't seem to understand," she rejoined. "It's her or me. Once and for all."

As she stood there he remembered how he had loved her, at the first, how he had believed he would always love her, and how little she was to him really now. He would have given all he possessed to have been able to say, "Don't be silly! You, of course," and to have taken her then and there in his arms, and hugged her, but the words died away in his throat, before they ever reached his lips. He uttered no sound, and the door closed between them.

"Her or me!" This ultimatum struck him as essentially vulgar. It was like a scene on a "movie," in a Brooklyn boarding house, or a villa in Surbiton. It jarred on his finer senses, destroying his regret. Aleen would never have hurled indiscriminate pronouns at his head at the breakfast table, but then she would never have made the grand initial mistake. Even if she had opened the letter in error, on which point he felt dubious, surely the first line would have showed it was not for her, and she ought never to have referred to it again. Perhaps that was asking too much of a woman, but after all what was to be be gained by making a fuss? What did she expect him to answer, what could she? If he said, "Why you, of course," she couldn't hope that he would rush to her bedroom, and forget Aleen for ever in an instant. Ridiculous! besides he had no wish to.

The door opened, and his only child came in. Leo's face was red, and his eyes suffused with tears. He stood in front of his father, with twitching lips. Suddenly he burst out:

" You have made mother cry. I hate you! I hate you! " and rushing at him, he kicked him with the concentrated fury of childhood.

Antony quietly and without anger, held him off.

" Child, child," he muttered, " what do you know of tears! "

A servant entered and took Leo away. He remembered expostulating with his wife for wishing to christen him Leo, but as usual she had her way. It was another sacrifice he had made to suburbia. Now, in spite of it all, it had come to an end. He was glad that it should, glad to realise his freedom again, even at the expense of remorseful hours he knew would intervene.

He never noticed Sophie come in, till he heard her voice.

" I am in earnest," she was saying, " what are you going to do? "

He looked at her dreamily, before answering:

" Nothing."

" Think what you are giving up. I should say, breaking up, our home! Leo—everything—oh! haven't you any heart? Sometimes I think you don't care for anything on God's earth! "

He was thinking to himself " Very little " and of how man had smeared the face of God's earth, everywhere with his dirty fingermark, but forbore to answer.

" Appeal to you, I suppose, is useless. You've obviously made up your mind."

" I can't! " he said.

" Can't what? "

"Do what you ask me! It's too big a slice out of my life. You've got me. I'm very fond of you, and always shall be. Won't you be satisfied with that?"

"While you're loving another woman at the same time! How dare you degrade me like this?"

"Don't! dont make a scene, please," he asked, moving further away.

"Scene!" she hissed back at him. "You can do what you like, live with other women, come home at any hour you wish, and it's all right, so long as I don't ask any questions. If I do, of course I'm melodramatic! second-rate. That's what you think me, not in your class. Oh yes! I know quite well what's in your mind! Anyhow this is our last scene. I'm going back to my family, and you can go to your mistress as soon as you like, for all I care."

She banged the door behind her, and he listened to her in the room above, tramping backwards and forwards, giving directions to her maid. Then someone opened the front door, and a taxi drove up. He listened to the tread of men's feet taking trunks downstairs: and last of all he heard his wife talking in a whisper to Leo.

Then the hall-door closed. He must have sat still a very long time turning over in his mind, the events of the morning, wondering if he oughtn't to go abroad directly, in order to escape the unpleasantness that must follow, when lunch was announced.

He caught the maid looking at him, but she acted as if she was unaware that anything unusual had taken place.

"Get me a bottle of the best Moselle I have," he told her. "The cellar key is on my writing table. No! bring me a flagon of Steinwein instead."

II.

When "old" Blessington had finished the early morning interview with his chief he found a telegram on his table, to the effect that he was to return home at once. For an instant he regretted that he had always opposed the family wish to have the telephone installed at Westbourne Grove. But up till now, there had been no adequate reason. He had his own telephone in his room at the institution and the grocer was most obliging to his wife and daughter. On one or two occasions only, in the whole course of his career had he left before the usual hour, and he didn't feel at all inclined to go: but the absence of any suggestion as to the reason for recalling him, led him to think it must be serious. Having arranged matters to his satisfaction, he hurried home, in a state of anxious bewilderment. He half expected to find them grouped on the doorstep, waiting for him to turn the corner, but the house looked just as peaceful as he ran up the steps. Twice he had to call out in the hall before anyone came, and then it was only the servant, who told him "they were in the mistress's bedroom." As he approached, he heard such a babble of conversation, that drove the idea of illness out of his mind. He heard Elaine his eldest daughter, saying with emphasis, "Brute!" and on opening the door, was surprised to see Sophie, holding Leo's hand, seated on the large double bed—the bed in which she had been born

twenty-five years ago. His eye took in the details of her dress, and for an instant he fancied something must have happened to her husband, as she was entirely dressed in black. But they soon undeceived him, by pointing out in their most emphatic manner, that it was the discovery of Tony's dual existence that was the cause of summoning him from the Institution. So far from being dead it was his excessive liveliness that had forced Sophie to abandon him to his gavotte. She had failed to keep measure to his step, and so he had found another partner. He sat on the very edge of the bed and heard Sophie's story, intermixed with interjections from the rest of the family, and could only suggest telephoning to Antony, which met with nobody's approval, as being a useless waste of time. Apparently he was to select his biggest walking-stick, and to beat his son-in-law into a pulp, after which Sophie and he were to live happy ever after. After trouncing him as a blackguard, his daughter was to sleep with him the next night. British morality must be vindicated at all costs! Poor old Blessington wished himself back in his office, before he had listened to them for three minutes. At the end of half an hour, he doubted the wisdom of adding children's misfortunes to his own. But he could see the cudgel was useless, thereby incurring the contempt of everyone. The alternative was to sit down, and write an indignant letter in the best style of the Institution, and to await results. The " awaiting " would be simply disagreeable—and so were the family: so overbearing in fact, that they hustled him into a taxi, and slamming the door on him, told the driver to take

him at full speed all the way to Brompton Square. Old Blessington fidgeted in the cab, wondering what he would say to his errant son-in-law.

It was really too unkind of him not to "hit it off" with Sophie, disturbing the whole happy, calm existence of the Blessington family. Surely he had a right to expect, that having settled his daughter on a man possessed of a handsome income, they should arrange their differences without his help. What right had Antony to love anyone but Sophie? They had vowed before an altar that this love would never change, and he had broken his vow. It was monstrous! absurd! it could never really be so! He refused to believe it. It would be an insult to himself, to the Institution, to a part descended from one of the pillars of the Empire.

The taxi stopped, and old Blessington felt a slight nervousness as he waited for the maid to answer the bell.

The last of the Steinwein had been drunk, but before old Blessington had time to open his mouth, on being shown into the dining-room, his son-in-law insisted on his joining him in another bottle. At first he declined abruptly, feeling that the moment had come when he must assert himself, but the sight of the new flagon straight from the cold cellar, and Antony's calm remark, "As you like. I can drink it myself," made him reconsider his decision.

"I suppose you've come about Sophie?" he said when the servant had gone.

"Yes," said old Blessington playing with the stem of his wineglass. "This quarrel, this absurd little row, of course it can't go on. I'm sure there's nothing

in it." He hesitated, looking at his son-in-law whose thoughts seemed anywhere but in the dining-room at Brompton Square.

"What wine!" remarked the elder after a long pause whilst searching as to how to continue the conversation. "It is a long time since I have drunk any so good."

"I only drink it on special occasions," said Antony, without looking up. "Another glass?"

"It is difficult to resist. Yes, I think a dry biscuit will make it perfect."

He was conscious that he was not getting on very well, and that the annoyance he felt in the cab had evaporated to a large extent. If only the man would say something, but he just sat motionless, staring at the golden-coloured wine in front of him.

"My dear boy," said old Blessington, bracing his nerves for the effort, "this pother with Sophie's all rubbish, isn't it? Who's this woman you've got in tow? Where did you pick her up? Come, as man to man, I want to help you out of this scrape. Tell me!"

"It's very good of you, but I'm in no scrape."

"No scrape!" gasped old Blessington, "when by your conduct you've made your wife leave the house, with her child! No scrape! when you're writing love-letters to another woman! No scrape when it's found out! By God, sir! if you're not in a scrape now, when the devil will you be? Not in this world! not in this: but in the next if you don't get out of this one."

Antony looked at his father-in-law with an expression of cold surveying pity.

" I'm afraid," he said talking quite slowly, " it's not much use explaining my intentions to you. We look at life from such a totally different point of view, that it would be useless to expect you to understand mine, much less to agree with me. Briefly, for the sake of what people say, I have decided not to return to Sophie! Yes, I mean it—don't interrupt —I don't believe in marriage in the sense that you and the majority of others believe in it. The vows given at the altar mean no more to me, than what my conscience and my desires dictate. The rites are Pagan relics: the marriage service itself, with its unveiled sensualism, is written from the wrong point of view, and bereft of almost all beauty. Once the inner understanding, the souls in the people are separated, there can be no more marriage. Once the invisible light that as a thin blue flame stretching upwards between the two goes out, for ever, then what you call marriage becomes a thing, gaunt, crude in its ugliness. There is nothing between Sophie and myself, but the veneer of a thin respectability, laid on for the benefit of others. She ended it. She was right. She had the courage I lacked. I have never admired Sophie before, but I did the moment she banged the door behind her, and went out."

For a moment old Blessington stared.

" But you're not seriously . . . ."

Antony interrupted him at once.

" I am. For months I have thought all these things over. Believe me, when I tell you in all sincerity that I have tried so hard to recapture some of the real love I felt once for Sophie. But it is impossible. The thin blue flame between us is extinguished: no

one can relight it. We must both begin to love again, and to learn to live more wisely. I will arrange with my solicitors for her future. Have no fear as to that: she shall be well provided for. Should she wish at any time to be rid of me legally, I've no doubt that can be arranged also. For the present good-bye. I leave London directly. Tell Sophie, that I am sorry if I have caused her pain, it was unintentional. But pain and life are two inseparables, aren't they? Good-bye."

Before old Blessington had time to recover his astonishment, the door closed between them, and he heard Antony going upstairs, whistling softly to himself. It was not till he was standing on the pavement outside that he found breath enough to ejaculate:

"Well! I'm damned! The brute!"

III.

When Antony went upstairs, he pulled a chair to the window of his dressing room and sat down to consider the immediate position. Though not in any way surprised at being so, he was delighted to find the interview with his father-in-law had left him undisturbed in mind. He felt he had emerged with credit though he had not stated his views as clearly or succinctly, as he would have liked. He noted he had felt nerveless at the mention of Sophie's name, for it showed how far she had already drifted out of his life. He began to wander about his room, looking at the books he loved, wondering what he ought to do with them, when he went away, as he

must do. For an instant he paused instinctively at the door of her bedroom to knock, but remembering, went in. The room was in disorder. Scraps of tissue paper lay scattered over the floor; in a corner some odd stockings and a satin shoe; on the sofa a silk petticoat with a torn flounce. He opened a "tall-boy." A quantity of "lingerie" remained on the sliding shelves, exhaling a violet perfume. Thinking how much more delicate jasmine was, he wondered what Aleen used, and whether she would like a large bottle of "Mary Garden."

Sophie never had any tastes different from other people; even when dressed in her best clothes, he always thought of her as having "*une figure qui sent le mannequin.*" He remembered soon after they were married expostulating with her for wearing crimson satin stays, when such other delightful fabrics were available. She had retorted angrily that he knew nothing about these matters. But he did: it made him feel he had married someone from a Euston Square boarding house.

Other memories came to him, as he sat on the bed looking out at the house-tops. A thin rain had commenced to fall, and he listened to the passers-by shouting for cabs . The figure of Christ on the top of the Oratory was dimly visible through the hazy atmosphere. He remembered a wonderful photograph of it, by a friend of his from a housetop opposite, under which he had written "All ye that pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!"

Why did he recall this now? He felt no sorrow, merely a strange, a quiet peace. Then he thought

of Aleen—it was lucky she was an orphan, dear delightful person. Ever since they had met, she was perpetually in his thoughts. He had slowly realised that he considered nobody else, that nothing counted, was of any importance, but what Aleen did and thought. At first he had looked upon their relationship as a wonderful friendship: but that stage hadn't lasted long, for he realised quickly, there existed between them something very much deeper. Vaguely his mind wandered to thoughts of other worlds, to lives lived and forgotten, to lives still to be lived. Had she been his companion before, how had they missed each other now? So many years wasted among the crowds of people in the search for each other.

From his earliest youth he had dreamt of a land unlike any earth down here, where the sky was always golden spreading to a faint pink, and the souls of those waiting to be born again, walked in the likeness of beautiful children. Some sat, hand in hand, listening to a music more divine than we can conceive; whilst others roamed amidst the woods, and along the streams, in the ecstasy of ethereal love. At nights they lay down on the soft moss, from where, looking at the stars so close to their world, they talked of their love, making plans to be together in the world—our world—below, and never to grow tired of each other, but to love as they did now. In the morning they would rise refreshed, and roam again through the valleys, and over the hills, talking to the woods and birds and flowers, who spoke to them in intelligible language as they do to us, only we can't understand them,

for we have become as limited as our surroundings. Perhaps after all, truth lies folded in our dreams.

Suddenly remembering Aleen knew nothing of what happened, he ran downstairs, and hailing a passing taxi, soon found himself on her doorstep. She was alone, lying on a sofa, propped up by pillows, reading. As he came in, he hesitated, as if remembering something he had forgotten. He stood still for an instant taking in her black silk dress, the details of the multi-coloured scarf round her waist, the string of pearls about her neck, set off the more luxuriantly because of the whiteness of her throat. He noted the black silk stockings, the shoes with old English silver buckles, the frill of her black lace petticoat peeping out irregularly, languidly from beneath her skirt. She had put down her book, waiting for him to speak.

At last he found words, after an interval of seconds, that seemed half-hours to him.

"You didn't expect me," he said, pulling over a high cushion and seating himself by her side. "I have forgotten your flowers."

"I don't expect them always," she answered.

"It's not often I forget."

She waited for him to continue, but he remained silent. Disengaging her hand she stroked the curls, that grew thick at the back of his head.

"Poor old man!" she whispered, "what's the matter?"

"The crisis!" It has come."

"The crisis!" she repeated.

"Yes," he said. "Sophie has gone. She had been watching us—our correspondence. She opened

your letter of yesterday to me. This morning she made a devil of a scene, and in the end banged out of the house, back to her father."

"And you—?"

"Oh! I did nothing. The breaking point had to come sooner or later. Old Blessington came round —they fetched him post haste from the Institution. I was at lunch at the time. I filled him up with Steinwein, which deprived him of the power of abuse, and sent him home."

She dropped her book over the back of the sofa, playing with the row of pearls between her lips, silent, seeming oblivious to his presence. He watched her wondering what he should say next, when of a sudden there arose within him, the fierce desire for this woman. There was nothing between them now, no reason why she should not belong to him: he had shed all that was between them. As he watched her this passionate desire rose almost to a frenzy. The brute within him for the first time in his life was roused. He felt the fury seize him, and shut his eyes to shut her out from his vision. Her hot breath reached him, as she said:

"You did nothing! What could you do, of course! And Blessington, he was abusive, would have been, had he dared."

Again he looked at her, watching her breast gently rising up and down, as she repeated:

"Nothing, of course, nothing, but wait."

She was sitting upright now, looking at him with her wide open eyes, seeming to be drinking in his inner thoughts. He passed his hands across his, to obscure their light. They blinded him, blurred

his proper senses. He stretched out his arm catching her hand, and drew her nearer. Half-rising from the cushion, he leant towards her and then in a flash threw her away from him, sinking back on the cushion again, buried his face in his hands.

She was saying:

"And Sophie, she won't take it 'lying down.' She's not that type . . . . There will be a row, perhaps a scandal . . . . perhaps . . ."

He muttered: "You can't be dragged in at any rate. You are clear."

"Would you mind if . . ."

The last part of the sentence was lost to him.

"I should," he said. "I care too much for you for that."

She felt it was purely said, from the truth in the depths of his soul, not often disclosed.

"Too much!" he added.

A wave caught her on the crest of her emotion and she asked him weakly:

"What would you have me do?"

But he never answered. Disgusted with himself, he was striving to force the "Brute" back to its lair. Till this moment he had always looked at her through the glasses of companionship, and now he felt that he desired her both body and soul. This was the degrading thing that was eating into his very heart destroying in a moment his pride, his self-respect. So far he had kept his love for her untarnished, and now . . . . ! He remembered the lines:

" And where the red was, lo! the bloodless white,
" And where truth was, the likeness of a liar,
" And where day was, the likeness of the night."

" Better anything than this," he thought to himself. " Better self-effacement, complete, than desecrate the altar he had raised to her in his imagination." It seemed to him he had committed a sin as against the Holy Ghost.

" Can one care too much? " she was asking. " Isn't the other to be considered? Has that one no rights? "

" I have none," he answered. " I have lost them since I came here."

He looked at her again, taking in all the details of her dress and the delicately polished finger nails. Just the thing that he had come to tell her remained unsaid. It had to remain so till he was master of himself once more.

She rose from the sofa and leant against the mantelpiece with her back to him, peering into a mirror.

" What d'you intend doing? "

" I haven't made up my mind yet—that is, not exactly," he answered, going over to join her.

" Not made up your mind? Yes! I suppose—a difficult situation!—much to think of."

" New! " Then he added, " Though not altogether unforeseen, unprovided for."

" I should have thought you would have considered possibilities, and been prepared."

He looked up quickly, noticing a slight change in her tone—a slight contempt, he thought.

"You can never be wholly," he answered, quickly. "And you?" —

He knew it was a mistake the moment he said it, but the words had slipped out.

"Me!" she gasped. "This has nothing to do with me. It's your affair!"

She had drawn herself up to her full height, grasping the mantelpiece with one hand. He formed the impression that she was waiting for something that hadn't happened, that was going farther away, that might escape her altogether. He dropped his eyes a little, letting them rest on her rounded throat. A shudder went through her frame, seeming to glide from head to foot: then she turned away, resuming her position on the sofa.

"Aleen," he said, "you don't understand."

She interrupted him.

"Is there anything more to understand?" she asked, quickly.

"Nothing I can tell you at present," he answered. "Try and forgive me for the moment. May I come to-morrow, or soon, at any rate. I want to be alone with myself for a time—to think."

A few days after, when he called, it was to learn from the maid that "Miss Montague had left for Paris."

IV.

Seated in the window of the "Marguery," sipping cognac, Antony watched the crowd wandering along the Boulevard.

" I wonder if they are happy," he thought, " or are they, like myself, with no very definite feeling one way or the other."

At the table next to him a young girl was being " looked after " by a hideous, fat, Jew, who pressed her hand emphatically from time to time. More than once she caught his eye and winked, and it crossed his mind how all that mattered sprang from sex, both the nice and the disagreeable things, and how badly arranged the whole business was. Women really dominated men. They deprived them of their liberty; took all their money; made martyrs of themselves as to bearing children, and, having but scant imagination, were satisfied to be tied up to the same person for ever. He recalled how Sophie accused him of having changed since they were married; but that was only half the truth, for they had both changed entirely. They had walked into a fantastic garden hand in hand; but had walked out again separately; they had found the main road dull, and there were too many by-paths.

As he sat there he remembered that he was awaiting a disagreeable letter in some senses, but at any rate he would be free. Sophie's " decree nisi " against him was to be heard that day, in fact, had been heard, he supposed. He thought of her dressed almost lavishly in black, and was certain she had selected her daintiest underclothes for the occasion. Large tears would wander down her face, which the Judge would pretend not to watch. He was glad nothing could be said against Aleen: it was so easy to arrange for another victim among the semi-professionals. Then in six months he would

be free—entirely his own master, and in a position to marry the only woman he cared for.

Two mornings after the letter came and with it a copy of the *Daily Mail*. Sophie's solicitors wrote saying that their client had now obtained what reparation she could at the hands of the British Empire and British Justice for his cruel and heartless conduct. and they intended to exact to the last penny the permanent alimony and all the costs including their own fees: and they further threatened all sorts of penalties if he dared approach or annoy Sophie in any way. The letter amused him—this dearly-bought professional attitude. What humbugs men were. On the back sheet of the *Daily Mail* the first thing that caught his eye was a photograph of Sophie leaving the courts. Though she seemed to be swathed in the deepest black he thought she looked remarkably happy. With an oath he tore the paper to pieces. "They would photograph a man being hanged," he exclaimed, "if only they were allowed."

The degradation of modern life struck him. He flung open the window and looked down on the crowd below in the street. Women with furs flung negligently round their naked shoulders lolled through the streets; behind them came the shop-girls, walking more quickly, but imitative, suggestive. Others passed with hard, intense faces, with the expression of the business man or woman.

"Time was," he thought, "when the world was in pursuit of pleasure: it is now in pursuit of money."

He shut the window again, for a sudden longing

came over him for the peace of fields and the strange stillness of meadows. He wished to lie drowsing among the wild flowers and forget all that had happened lately—the vulgarity of every action.

"I will go, now at once," he muttered, "while the mood is on me, right into the heart of the country and try and leave my memory in its quietude."

V.

More than a year passed during the whole of which Antony Sloane had wandered up and down Italy. He had never seen Aleen since though he had written to her on occasions and she had answered him affectionately enough to assure him he was not entirely forgotten. Her flight to Paris had left him more than unhappy, and her letters, in spite of his questions, unexplained. He had worked hard at Italian during all these months, and taken his recreation in studying the various schools of painting and listening to music. The few friends he had in Italy had seen but little of him and complained, not without reason, that he had become a hermit. Yet never for a day had Aleen passed from his mind. He felt his work was to prepare himself to meet her again. The "Brute" had been strangled. Beside the darkened altars at night in the dim churches of past centuries he had laid bare his thoughts. By the sacred creations of the dead artists; among the cantations of the dead masters: under the shining stars and the cold cynical moon, he had recovered possession, the mastery, of his own self. Yet he loved Aleen the more fervently. She had become the

constant companion of his thoughts, and seemed to have grown with him into his larger mind.

Now he had come to Florence—seeing her name as a visitor in a newspaper at the "Hotel d'Italie"—intent on seeing her, of renewing their old intercourse. It never occurred to him that she might not wish to do so, might have found other aspirations, a new future. He had never wavered in his faith: she had grown almost into a religion. Though he still wanted her companionship both of body and mind, he wanted it differently—a sort of sacred trust. During these last fifteen months he had had ample opportunity of finding out for himself his desires and determinations. Sophie had drifted completely out of his life; he never heard much of her beyond the fact that she had taken a flat in Knightsbridge, for which, of course, he paid. Leo was at a preparatory school, and an aunt had written that "he was a nice-looking boy, but with the manners of a Welshman." The rest of his family had removed his name from their Christmas card list.

For three days he had been in Florence and had sent Aleen no note. He wished to cut off her retreat by meeting her face to face in a gallery, giving her no opportunity of avoiding him. For three days he had haunted the Uffizi, the Orsanmichele, the Pitti, and every other possible place, but without success. Then one evening, as he was standing on the Ponte Vecchio, he saw her coming towards him.

If Antony had ever doubted himself before he could have no doubt now. He listened to his heart beating violently, and felt a sensation of dizziness creep over him. Leaning against the balustrade he

watched her coming nearer and nearer. Then she saw him. Stopping, she half turned to get away, but he was beside her in an instant.

"Don't," he said, "don't go away. I've been looking for you for days—I might truthfully say months."

The retort on her lips remained unspoken. With a little laugh she answered instead:

"I never knew you were such a 'sticker'!"

For a few minutes they walked in silence. Suddenly he stopped.

"You have been rather a beast to me," he said. "Own it, and I'll forgive you on the spot. Deny it, and——"

"The penalty?" she queried.

"You must lunch and dine with me to-day, both!"

A smile rippled round her mouth.

"I deny it emphatically," she replied. "I don't mind lunching, but I'm engaged to dinner."

"We'll go to the Westminster. I always lunch in my sitting-room. D'you mind?"

A nervous constraint imbued them both through the lunch. The necessary presence of the waiter aggravated Antony, who spoke to him sharply several times, and it was not till the liqueurs and coffee were reached that, left to themselves, he felt the fog between them vanish.

He leant across the table putting out his hand towards her.

"Won't you take it?" he asked, as Aleen made no movement in response. "In the old days you

always did, and they're not so very far off, are they? Have you forgotten?"

"Why d'you want me to? Haven't we travelled very far since then—far enough to forget them?"

"You! D'you mean you've changed?"

He looked at her with the sudden sense that she had outgrown him: that all these months while he had been marking time, trying to obtain the mastery over himself, she had been going forward without him. Whilst he had been treasuring her recollection, she had been wilfully engaged in forgetting his. Out of his sense of loneliness he muttered:

"You can never know how much I—how much I had to conquer——"

He stopped, appalled at the desolation he knew would be his in the future. For months her photograph had watched him as he wrote from across the writing table: he had often kissed it at night in ecstasy, and when he rose in the morning. In his wanderings he roamed with Aleen in his thoughts, and sleeping, knew that he was with her in his dreams.

"No!" she said, "it was not I who changed—it was you!"

The fog descended again.

"I!" he gasped.

"You said you hadn't made up your mind what you were going to do—that day when you called on me to tell me about Sophie. I had to make up my mind. Don't you understand?"

Antony could only murmur:

"It was you who didn't."

"You weren't prepared. You never thought of me!"

"It was thinking of you too much," he answered. "I wanted you always. Then and there I wanted to take you away with me—out into the wide world—out of our narrow society. But how could I tell you this just then? Might you not have answered 'Will you not tire of me also?' Would you not have asked me to consider your position a little more? Oh! I see now it was all a mistake, Aleen. Can't you care for me now, as I have cared for you ever since we met? You never understood; you never can!"

He walked to the window and looked out across the Square to the Campanile. A slight drizzle was falling and the few pedestrians were hurrying home.

She began to put on her furs.

"Aleen!"

She looked at him with wide open eyes for an instant, giving to him the sense that she had something that she wished to give him of a kind exclusively her own; that she had never thought of giving to anyone before even if, in fact, she had been aware of her possession. Perhaps she had only just woken up to it, for she gave a little gasp, and was gone. But, putting her head in again at the door, she cried to him:

"You may take me to dinner to-night, if you like, after all!"

LA CASA DE LA FELICITA

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IT is many years ago that I came across Henry Thompson, living alone in his villa on the road from Milan to Pavia. The thirst for Italy had attacked me one night in my rooms in Dublin, too strongly to be resisted, and the next evening found me in London, feverishly waiting to book a seat in the train-de-luxe for Milan. It has always been one of my favourite cities, perhaps because it has never been appreciated by tourists, bent on flocking Southward, and one can remain there in quiet, and at peace, enjoying to the full its priceless treasures of art.

Lazily smoking a "trabucco" one afternoon in the Cavour gardens, it occurred to me to drive out into the country. At first I dismissed the thought from my mind, for I have to scrape my way along on a most modest income, and any unnecessary extravagance has to be rigorously eschewed. But perhaps because the Spring was in my blood, and the call of the flowers came to me overstrong, I hailed a passing vettura, telling him to drive along the road to Pavia. I had no intention of going as far. The alternating ricefields and meadow are not very interesting to drive through, but the name came naturally to my lips, and after all it does not matter much where one drives for a couple of hours, so long as it is in the country, when one has been shut up for months between high walls of brick, and noisy, dull, depressing streets.

Half-an-hour must have passed at least, and Milan was left behind, when just by a turning in the road, I saw an old iron gate with an uninhabited lodge beside it. Over it hung a heavy canopy of ivy, entwined with jessamine, and honey-suckle. The stone-work was green with moss, and the carved figures of a man, and a woman's head at the top of the gateway pillars, smiled down at me in quiet peace.

I shouted to the driver to stop, and getting out, pushed the gate open, and went in.

An ill-weeded avenue led to a villa, partly hidden by the trees, just bursting into foliage. No smoke was coming from the chimneys, nor as I stood listening, could I catch the sound of a voice, or any cry, or movement to shew me that it was not derelict. For all this, a sense of peace pervaded my being. Somehow the thought came to me, that living here one could be happy, that here one would forget nations, and parliaments, and all those tiresome things that make the beautiful world so unhealthy a place in the twentieth century.

I went up the avenue, and found myself in front of a large stone villa, with a wide verandah running round it. To the right stretched a beautifully kept garden with terrace sloping to lawns, where marble cupids danced under the silver water of the flowing fountains. Beyond a wood, bright with the greenest spring foliage, dotted, here and there, with flowering shrubs, and patches of purple lilac. Tame doves cooed to each other hidden from sight among the leaves, while pigeons joyous in their youth, bobbed, and courtesied, as they strutted on the lawns. Above

all the Italian sun, the blue, blue sky, the sense of satisfied desire, unsatisfied in dreams.

Forgetting all about the vettura, I sat down on the terrace, wondering to myself what sort of person lived in such a place. The ill-kept gateway, and approach, must, I felt, be so from design, and not from chance; and then it occurred to me that perhaps the owner wished to live in seclusion, and to present nothing attractive to the passer-by. A footstep on the gravel path behind, brought me to my feet, and I turned to find a middle aged man approaching. I was about to apologise for my intrusion, when he held out his hand in welcome.

"It is rare that I am honoured with a visitor," he said, "you are all the more welcome."

"Forgive my trespass, I have just driven out from Milan. Your curious gateposts attracted me, and I looked in. I couldn't help it!"

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered. "Won't you come into the house?"

With a gesture he turned and led the way through the now open windows into a library, filled with books, carefully protected from dust by glass. A few pictures hung on the walls, splendid copies for the most part of well-known masterpieces, carefully labelled: an original Schidone of the Virgin with the Infant Christ; a sketch of the crucifixion by Solari; a head of some saint in oils attributed to Luini. These caught my glance, as I stood fumbling for words to explain my presence.

"Although I have labelled that as merely attributable to Luini," he said, "I believe it to be genuine. But what does it matter? It is my favourite

picture. As I look at it, I feel an indescribable sense of peace spread over me."

"The head of a man who has suffered," I remarked.

"The work of an artist who had," he ejaculated in a tone that made me turn, and look at him. A curious face! I can see him now as I write, standing by the mantelpiece, gazing at the picture, with his long oval features, and pointed beard, and delicate thin hands, a figure out of the pages of a story-book, some fantastic tale forgotten since our youth. His low soft voice, with hardly moving lips, and deep expressive eyes gave me at first the impression of sadness: and yet when he turned, a smile lit up his whole countenance, of such enthusiasm that made me glad that I had chanced across him.

"D'you know Luini's work," he continued. "It is strange how little he is appreciated in England, or I should say by those who flock to Italy. Yet he was a really great artist, whose pictures impress one with their superb refinement. Such colour, too! How he would have hated this modern life, with all its bustle, and feverish struggle for existence. It would have stifled him, as it has hundreds of others. His art would have been impossible. It was too delicate to have thriven in this age. Perhaps this very quality has kept him comparatively unknown for so long."

"True," I said, "one hears and sees little of his works outside Italy. People are brought up on a few names such as Leonardi, and Michael Angelo, and think with them their artistic education is finished."

"It is a long time since I have been in England,"

he went on, " when I was there last, I noticed what little progress art had made. As a nation we think it trivial, never realising the importance that the creation, and contemplation of beautiful things has on character. We are the ultra products of the iron age. It has its drawbacks. Commercialism has become supreme. Party-politics have eaten their way into the soul of the people, corrupted it. By bitter experience they have learnt, that to succeed one must join in the game : it has taught them to sell their souls for power, and to pledge their word as so much stock-in-trade."

" You're rather severe," I said. " Are we worse than any other country? "

" I love England, and the English. They are the one humane nation in the whole world. Long ago they set themselves a standard to live up to, and I fear the standard has been too high. Did you ever read Ibsen's ' Master-Builder ' ? No ! Read it some day : you will understand my meaning. Let's talk of something else. Won't you smoke? "

" I must be going. I have stayed too long. I have a vettura at the gate."

" You are staying in Milan? " he asked.

" Yes, at Cavour."

" For long? "

" A week or so."

" Will you come here for a few days. I am all alone. I shall be only too delighted. My name is Henry Thompson. I am well known in Milan."

He would take no denial, and as he accompanied me down to the gate, I promised to spend the week-end with him.

On the way back, I wondered why I had agreed, but even the nicest of hotels, when one is alone, is rather a mausoleum.

Anyhow it would give me another chance of studying the Luini.

* * *

"I am sorry you are leaving Milan to-morrow," he said. "I hope you will come again."

We were sitting on the verandah after dinner and the smoke from our cigars was slowly circling upwards in the strange stillness of an Italian evening.

Occasionally a murmur borne on a passing breeze reached our ears, while the faint reflection of light in the heavens told us of a far off city where men, and women, laughed and wept, while only the wild song of the nightingale broke the silence of the night.

"Why not come with me to Florence," I said. "I would like a companion, and should be delighted if you would."

"I rarely leave here," he answered with a tinge of sadness in his voice. "It is only about once in three or four years, that I can bring myself to pack up, and then I am always longing to return."

I looked at my friend, wondering what had made him settle down so early in life, in this strange out-of-the-way place, so far removed from intercourse with friends, and all those interests which we group together, and vulgarly say make life worth living.

Perhaps he divined my thoughts, for he interrupted them.

"I have only known you for a few days, and you may think it strange that I am going to tell you, what

scarcely anyone can possibly know, or guess. But time does not count in a friendship, and I feel you are a friend already."

I held out my hand; he took it in his rough grasp.

"No!" he said, as if answering a question he was in the habit of putting to himself, "I am very happy. I have my gardens, and my library, a beautiful climate, and health to enjoy it. Is there much else a man can desire?"

I did not reply. I wanted so much more than these.

"It is over fifteen years ago, that I came here. It was just what I was looking for, an out-of-the-way place to help me to lose myself, by that I mean, the absurdly self-important part of one's self. Just as you did, I drove out from Milan, and stopped to look in at the gateway. The place was very different then—but I have kept the avenue as it was. It serves to remind me that the Present is only the child of the Past. Nobody had lived here for years, and the grass had grown feet high on the walks: it was just a wild waste, with the trees rising coldly ominous in the background. The driver told me it was to let. I bade him take me to the agent, who stared when I told him I wanted to go over it, and that if I liked it, I would buy it. We arranged to visit the villa the next day, and in the meantime I learnt it was thought to be haunted, which was all the better for me, as it meant that I could get it at a lesser price. I bought it for next to nothing—over fifteen years ago, and have lived here ever since. Happy—well, are any of us altogether?"

He threw his cigar-end over the verandah, and

rising went to the other end, where he stood for some time, motionless, looking out into the night. Then he went in through the open windows to his bedroom, and I knew by the fragrance that he had thrown a fresh handful of incense on the brasier, that always burned before the Buddha.

"Few of us," he continued, returning to his seat, "succeed in being altogether happy. We grow too dependent on others, and do not search for the happiness that comes from the development of the inner self. I have learnt my lesson; others, I suppose, are learning it every day. School-life made little impression on me. I was lazy, but I had sufficient brains to keep my place. I made very few friends, but those I did, were, and are still sincere. Nature provided me liberally from an athletic point of view, but I preferred painting and reading the poets, to cricket, and football. All the time I was wondering, saying to myself 'Henry Thompson, what are you going to do in the world?' At that time, I thought a great deal. I have done nothing."

A pained look came across his face, as he sat quite still for a few minutes. His words made me think of my own life. I shivered and took a few sips of the old brandy at my elbow. It helped me to forget some of the years.

"I married very young, one who was attracted by the not very common traits she saw in my character. She admired all that I wrote, the music that carried me away, the plays that fascinated me. She believed I was certain to succeed, to cease to be nameless among the multitudes, that sooner or later, someone was bound to recognise my worth,

and put it to good uses. She was ambitious, not altogether in a selfish way, but she wanted to be proud of her husband, a very natural sentiment. It is easy to look up to the statue on a pedestal: it is hard to love in the gutter. It was her dream to be spoken of as the wife of Henry Thompson, the painter, the poet, the dramatist, politician, any of these, it didn't matter, so long as one of them spelt success. You smile! but I have tried all those professions, and have succeeded to a small extent in each, but in reality have done nothing!

"One has to live so many lives. After our honeymoon, I had a studio in Paris, where I studied painting at Rousseau's. She was beside me all the time telling me I must succeed. There was nothing common in my work, it was the painting of ideas, strong, perhaps a little cruel. The critics scoffed at it, men who couldn't paint a line themselves, wrote that I knew nothing about an art I had studied for years. In vain I told Lilian it didn't matter what they said: in vain I pointed out that these people have to write for their livelihood, and are necessarily trying to shew their own cleverness: that they have to dress their window with flaring ribbons, and tinselled gauzes. Her first ambition was blown to the winds. She had lived up to now, on the surface of youth. The sting of real life had not touched her yet.

"Did I tell you that I loved her? No! I think I forgot to say how much. Before I knew she cared for me, I adored her; if I used the word 'worshipped' I should not be putting too high a price on my affection. Literally I worshipped her. Once I re-

membered kneeling at an altar to Our Lady, and praying that she might be mine, and that if my prayer were granted, I was ready to pay whatever price was demanded in return. A foolish vow to offer in all sincerity. I have paid the price. It is folly to bargain with the deity.

"A political crisis came over England. Her enthusiastic soul burned for me to take part in it, and we returned to London. I put aside my paint brushes, and rushed headlong into the fray. Speaking presented no difficulty to me, for I had considerable practice at Oxford, and in my schoolboy days, my father used to make me frequently address him. I can see him now leaning back in his armchair, smoking a long cheroot after lunch, listening to me, as I stood on the hearthrug stammering for words.

"At first I was a success: invitations to speak showered on me: my meetings were packed. A rash constituency offered me a seat. But I possessed one fatal barrier to ultimate success. I was honest. I could not disguise my inner convictions. I had no wish to do so, no, not at any price. I laid bare the political jobbery rife in England: attacked a ministry that secretly bought, and sold its honours, and its honour: that was prepared to pay any price so long as it remained in power: that governed thinking only of popularity instead of justice, that whispered to the multitude, and grovelled at the feet of demagogues.

"The result? I had to withdraw from politics, and begin life afresh, all over again.

"It was a bitter blow to Lilian. I think it was then that she began to lose faith in me. You must

not blame her. Nature had fitted her to be the wife of a modern successful man, and she had married one who could never be that—a dreamer, perhaps, nothing more. She loved London, and was soon engulfed in Society. Beautiful, and with a most attractive manner, it was not to be wondered that she passed as a brilliant woman. Brilliancy means so little; anyone who reads the sort of books that nobody else reads, gifted with a retentive memory, can easily acquire the reputation. The two years of our married life had not been wholly wasted.

"I was sorry to give up all idea of a public life. While the excitement lasted it interested, and fascinated, but I was conscious the whole time, it was unsuited to me. I threw myself back into painting with a hitherto unknown delight, and also yielded to the desire to study the drama. I wrote several plays, which I consigned to the flames, and then thinking the latest worth a production, offered it to a manager. After waiting for about six months, I wrote asking him to return it. He did so, with a polite note, saying that he had read it with the greatest interest, but found the part unsuitable. A friend who knew the man personally, took it back, asking him, as a favour to herself, to read it. He did so, and accepted it, and wrote saying it was the best part he had ever been offered.

"Lilian was delighted, and brought all her friends to the first night. The play was justly a failure: but the nature of the attacks was unmerited; the Fleet Street scribblers enjoyed themselves immensely. What matter? I wrote others, one or two good plays, better, more full of ideas than most, strong

and dramatic, but they never saw the footlights. I had no syndicate behind me.

"Ambition! yes! that was what I lacked. Lilian had so large a measure of it. By this time she had achieved it socially. I rarely saw her, she was generally out somewhere or other with friends, whilst I dined at home or in Soho. All the same, I was happy. I loved her more and more every day. She was my divinity! my religion! my world! everything! all in one."

He paused as if struggling with some emotion that was trying to master him. I watched him pull a crimson rose to pieces, tossing the leaves over the verandah. Then he lit another cigar, and continued.

"It is something over fifteen years ago that I left her. She never deceived me. She just told me quite simply one evening, that she had ceased to care for me: she had struggled against it for months, but that it was impossible to disguise the truth any longer. I did not question her. Where would have been the use? Besides, she was just putting on her cloak to go to the opera. She had friends waiting by the box-office.

"Somehow or other I could feel no resentment. The truth is I loved her too much. All that I felt was a terrible unendurable anguish, that seemed as if it would never pass away. Hour after hour I sat, staring into the fireplace, recalling her every movement, her every gesture. Sometimes it was as if her soft cheek was laid against mine, and I could scent the fragrance of her hair. At others I had almost persuaded myself it was only a dream, and that nothing she had said was true, when I heard the

front door close, and listened to her footsteps growing fainter as she went upstairs. Quietly I let myself out into the street. There was no light in her bedroom, she was probably asleep, tired after the opera. How long I wandered about the empty city, I don't know, but I came across a Catholic Church, and there in the silence of the night, prayed as I have never prayed before. Then I remembered my vow, and knew I was being called upon to pay the price. But my world had come to an end. One has to begin Life so many times afresh.

"A few days afterwards, I went to Florence to see the Barrocci drawings in the Uffizi, about which I was writing an article, for some art journal. When I returned I found a bed had been put up in my dressing-room. She was out, as usual at some theatre, or supper-party with her friends. I heard her come in—the door was locked between us—heard her turn out the light. At breakfast the next morning, she was herself, delightful, full of interest about my journey and its results, asked to hear the article, and sat on the arm of the chair while I read it: and yet when I took her hand and kissed it, drew it back, and went out. The street-door shut behind her. From henceforth there was always a street-door between us.

"Artists are those who work unconsciously. They have something to express, an idea that has come to them from some unformulated world of thought. If they are dealing with the past, they clothe it in a form unrecognisable even to themselves, while at times their minds project into the future, and set down in detail what their sub-conscious self has

seen. Many think that our existence here is but a replica of what has taken place on another plane. It may be so; I am not prepared to discuss any such theory to-night. You can argue it out with yourself at another time. Listen!

"A few months after what I have told you we were in a hotel in the South of England. A balcony connected my room, the sitting room and Lilian's bedroom. A friend of hers had joined us for the week-end. I had only met him once or twice. He was about my age, a bachelor, one of the rising men it was said, in the House. He had means; witty beyond a doubt, and possessed of the négligé air only acquired by those for whom life has always been smooth. He entertained lavishly any who could be of use to him, and occasionally took his poor relations to the opera, as he was fond of music. He was deservedly popular, being disliked only by a few iconoclasts, of whom I was one. On this night I was correcting what I had written a few days before. It was a scene in a novel, in which a man makes love to another's wife. It has been written millions of times before, but then I was striving after realism.

"Wearied I put down my pen, and went out on the balcony. I forgot to tell you that it ran round the corner of the house, past her windows looking out on that side. I leant over listening to the sea breaking on the beach below. It was a perfectly still night, phosphorescent.

"Their voices were audible, murmuring dully a few yards away. I paid no heed to what they were saying, and lit a cigarette. I half hoped the flare of the match would attract their attention. I sank

into a low chair, lost in reflection. Never had the world seemed so beautiful as on that night. Only the sound of the sea, and now and again, commencing in the grey distance, the wind whispered, as it came to me, dancing among the trees. Just such a night, on which the souls of those who have passed over, reach down to earth again, blessing the world. I sat enthralled. I felt that it was magnificent to be alive.

"But I digress. The beauty did not last. The breeze came stronger, and the moon rose, pale, above dark clouds, beginning to hurry on their way. Their voices became more distinct. I did not want to listen, but the words hovered round me, lingering. And as I sat there, I felt a chill sweep through me, such as I have never known before, or since. It was petrifying; depriving me of the power to move, or speak. It was the cold that a spirit brings from the inner world. Some dead friend was watching with me, trying to bring me peace.

"I listened to her voice and his, playing one against the other, now and then strangely intermingling, expressive. The scene I had written some weeks before was being re-enacted over again. I almost expected my very words to be used: it would not have surprised me, if they, too, had come to life. He was urging her to come to him; pouring out his passionate love, talking wildly about destiny, and such deep powers that men call trivially to their aid. For the most part she remained silent, only once I heard her say: 'Yes, you are right. He was thinking of course of his own interests. He never understood me.'

"Long after their voices had died away, and they had gone indoors, I sat still, gaping into the night. Perhaps her words were true: I had 'never understood her'! Had I deceived myself from the outset? It seemed that all the time while I thought that I was working for her pleasure, I had really been developing my own talents. I had left her exactly where we had met, on the same spot on the road, so to speak: I had never made the slightest attempt to take her along with me. I had thrown her to the world to educate, and it had only brought her Love, the commonest of its gifts, not even in the rarest way. I had been, and I was, the barrier to her development. I had found her a child, and she was a child still. I should have carried her along, and not left her watching me receding into the distance. The social success that was hers, that she had won for herself had not satisfied her: her desires remained unattained. If I had forced her to feel, to grow, to understand with me, all might have been well. But I hadn't, I had added nothing to the building of her soul. I had been content to look upon it, and love it as it was, inanimately, unexpressed. You understand, don't you? It belonged to me, and I thought the matter settled once, and for all. It was my fault. I had left her just where I had found her.

"How long I sat there I have not the faintest notion. I only remember tearing my manuscript into pieces, and burning it page by page in the grate.

"The next day I went up to London, and wrote to her from there. No! I never told her what I

overheard; just that I was not returning—ever. I cared too much to crush her happiness. It was an easy thing to do, if only one loved enough. What did she think? Relief, I expect, at the time. At any rate, it was my turn not to be understood. A firm of rapscallion solicitors arranged a divorce; you can buy it, the same as anything else. Then I left England for Italy, and found this garden, as I told you."

He paused, perhaps waiting for me to say something, but I remained silent; oppressed by the stillness of the night.

"We put too great a value on the things of the moment," he continued, "treating this life as if it were eternity, yet it passes as a storm sweeps over a country, and beyond are years of joy unutterable. That is why I am happy. Sometimes I think, as I sit here in the evening, that I shall see her coming through the trees calling softly my name, and I shall go down to her, and put her arm in mine, and bring her here—to her home. It may be only fancy, but fancies come true sometimes."

Then the thought came to me, that though the days grow shorter, and shorter, the mountains are always blue.

THE SENTENCE

THE SENTENCE

Under the title "The Sentence" the "Fragment, etc." was produced at the Court Theatre, July 7th, 1908.

A FRAGMENT FROM AN UNDATED MANUSCRIPT THAT FELL IN THE HANDS OF AN ENGLISH MERCHANT OF BARCELONA.

January 23rd.

THE whole scene is vividly before my eyes: I live it over again in detail. The Judge in his black robes leans upon the panelled desk in front of him, listening to the droning tones of the clerk reading the indictment. It is stuffy in the court and he orders a window to be opened. A breath of pure air bursts in, and with it a ray of sunlight. I can almost follow the gust in its wanderings round the court: it reaches the black figure, and is playing on his hair, for I saw it touch the fine grey locks and hold them gently floating for an instant. Then it dashes round court, and misses me, I, who have been waiting for it for weeks, in dark confinement, foul with damp and fetid air, my only companions mice I have tamed to take bread from my hands. Tamed! Ah yes! I remember I killed one yesterday as it ate, scrunched it in my hand, twisted its neck—and why?—because I knew my hour had come, and I hated life, hated to leave it behind me, and I wanted to see death before I met it, to see what I should look like myself.

Just then I remembered the Judge's voice broke in on my reverie, asking me if I was Guilty or Not Guilty. Bah! The foolishness of it all. What had I done? Merely buried my poignard in a rascally friar; and for a good reason too, for had he not attempted to induce Alicia to fly with him to a convent, and to desert me? I hid behind a pillar and watched them. She was kneeling at the confessional, moaning aloud, and every now and then he bent his head a little and whispered his devilish temptations in her ear. An acolyte was swinging incense and the fumes wafted down in a great cloud of ghostly shapes. They knew! these things have life! they listened with me behind the pillar and talked and whispered in my ear. A mass was being said for the dead. The organ was thundering great depths in the bass: the whole cathedral was full of dead souls in sombre cloaked attire, marching noiselessly round from the chapel behind the altar, slowly up the aisle, disappearing again to reappear as before. And I alone saw them, was conscious of their tread. I could see them sitting in every chair, sharing it sometimes with a living person, with their arms round their unconscious prey. Fools! Yet men have called me mad! I've heard them in the streets, in the market place, looking out from the windows of their cottages; I've seen them as I pass, press their hands to their foreheads and mutter "Gotto! mad Gotto!" Mad! If only they knew! I've laughed to myself when I've thought of it till the tears have run down my cheeks. Mad! because I see where their eyes are covered, because I hear what it would be useless for them to listen

for, because the spirits of the world are my friends and pass them by, all except the spirits of the doomed when their time has come.

All this time the organ played its hollow notes, music that mocked the worshippers, but they knew it not. To me it groaned at them, laughed at them, derided them by turns. But then I was its friend; we had talked of such things before.

Alicia rose slowly from her knees, and I crept to the further side of the pillar that she might not see me. The curtains of the confessional were drawn aside, and the priest came out, looking for an instant to see which way she had gone. Then his eyes fell on me, and I knew what I must do, for I saw his doomed soul held him by the arm and walked with him down the aisle. I left my post, and followed quickly, thinking how loud my footsteps rang upon the marble flagstones. I was afraid that he might hear and, doubling my pace for terror I should miss him in the portico, caught him by the door and struck !—down ! down ! down !—it seemed I should never reach his soul.

I stood beside him as he lay, and watched the blood spreading in gutters on the pavement. I never spoke; I stood there, looking at the thing, listening, waiting for the sound of the beating of the winds to tell me his spirit had gone, for fear it might still live.

And then someone struck me ! What matter? What do I care? They do not understand life as I see it.

Guilty or not guilty?

I took a pace forward and looked at him calmly.

Should I tell him what I knew? No! even then he would not understand. I turned my back on him and fell once more into a reverie.

I was awakened by a shuffling in the court and my name being called out by the Clerk. The soldiers seized me, and held me close against the iron bars that surrounded me like a cage. The white head sat upright and droned aloud. I was guilty: I heard that, the rest would not matter. I watched the sun sinking in the west through the open window: it was red and angry and was scorching the clouds as they fled from it in all directions.

What was that I heard? I was to die by the garrotte—but I was to choose my own time. What did it mean? Was I mad after all? I bent forward and asked the sentence to be repeated; and he did so! I was to die in my own time, choose my own hour, day, year, perhaps—yes, even year. I asked the soldiers again. Yes, it was true. I had heard aright. The thing was absurd! But it shewed me that the old man sitting there with the shining locks understood my motives and sympathised with me: the only one who ever had. Think, only one soul in sympathy in the whole world!

I laughed loudly, and then I remember nothing more.

January 24th.

When I came to myself I found I was lying on a bundle of straw in a cell of modest dimensions; but my attention was instantly arrested by the fact that it communicated directly with the open air, which made the whole of the apartment light and airy. This surprised me so that I dared scarce move, and

lay for some time merely turning my head cautiously from side to side, feeling an unknown fear. I noticed a chair and a basin in which was some water, and near it a door, no doubt communicating with the guard-room.

From the direction I lay in I could see the yard with which my cell communicated was small and rectangular. There was a platform at the end built against the wall, and what looked like a dais on it. The sun was low in the heavens, and a black shadow was thrown across the end of the yard, and instinctively I dragged myself to the opening to get a better look at the thing. There was no mistaking it; it was the iron chair with the garrotte. I turned cold at once; a damp, raw feeling, like the mist rising from a new-dug grave, crept over me; my teeth almost chattered, and it was only by a supreme effort of will power I regained command over my nerves. I stood where I was for some time gazing at the fatal thing, when all of a sudden I remembered I was to choose my own time of execution. A reaction instantly set in, the mind dominating the body, for I realised at once what a fool I was to mind the sight of a death chair. The position was simple. The order of the Court was I alone could choose the time to die, and I would never do so. The chair on its platform and I in my cell would look daily on each other, companions in solitude from afar off; but I would never sit in it; until I did so, my life was my own; that is all. I am not likely to make a mistake.

February 20th.

It is nearly a month since I wrote my diary, for the most obvious reason that my sphere of action is

necessarily restricted. It begins to pall on me, but escape is out of the question. I am in a pit, nothing more or less, with a kennel at one end to sleep in. My food is brought to me by a jailer who is either dumb or will not speak. Each morning he enters, unlocking and unbarring the heavy door, and pointing to the yard, indicates the chair. I shake my head, he disappears; the same process of manipulation of locks and bolts, and that is all.

March 2nd.

Last night I went out in the yard, and felt every inch around the walls, hoping to find a fingerhold, a crevice I could enlarge quietly during the dark hours. But there was none. I must think over how I am going to make one. It will be difficult to do, as the walls are covered with a smooth cement.

March 6th.

I am beginning to take a peculiar interest in the chair. It no longer frightens me, and this morning I ventured for the first time to go quite close to it. I noticed the stake that forms the back, and the screw tightening the collar, and the straps for the legs and arms. A few weeks ago I should not have dared to take in these details, but I have now overcome any scruples.

March 19th.

I awoke last night, and looked out in the yard. The moon was flooding it with a ghostly light, and I noticed many shapes and forms were moving to and fro. My eye fell upon the chair, and the light was gleaming steadily on the iron band. It filled me with presentiments of evil, which, though I argued were unfounded, gave me a sleepless night, and

were only allayed when the dumb pantomime was gone through with my jailer in the morning.

March 22nd.

This morning when my keeper came to me, I laughed out loud at him, for his enquiry seemed so absurd. As if any man, much less one of my strength of will-power, would, under like conditions, seat himself on a platform and be quietly throttled, when he can live without any great discomfort, with a roof over his head.

April 22nd.

Good God! I have been walled up like a dead person inside these four walls for nearly six months, and yet I can think of no way of escape. I have crept at dead of night and worked for hours, with my fingers bound round with straw, to make a little niche, but without success, the cement is too hard; and yet if only I could scale the walls I feel sure I could escape. Last night I went and even stood upon the platform, and moved the screw, and watched the contraction of the iron collar. I wish I had the *padré* bound in the chair—what pleasure it would have given me! A turn of the screw every half hour, and then I would sit in front of him, with a watch in my hand, counting out the minutes so that he could hear.

That reminds me of Alicia. For some reason or other I have scarcely thought of her since the trial. My mind is divided: sometimes I look upon her with disgust, at other times with almost love. She listened, of course, to his entreaties—but what woman wouldn't? I cannot blame her for that. What surprise he showed when I struck him! What terror! It was the terror I remember, the speechless look of

hopeless fear that has painted itself on my brain. It was a magnificent triumph to have produced it, but it was too short-lived, for the many hues in the eyes faded away, leaving only a reflection of a statue. I think I must have struck too hard, or the expression would have lasted longer. Still, I was afraid to lose him: I should have killed myself with remorse if I had.

April 23rd.

A church is such a good place to take your revenge. It appeals to both the emotional and artistic side of one's nature. The notes of the organ fill one with energy. Especially I felt this with the bass notes, which filled me with an enthusiasm for my work like good wine does the body. And then there are always people in a church; and that is another advantage, for they see what you do, and how you do it, whether ill or well, and it fills them with envy. Yes, I am glad I selected a church to do it in.

April 30th.

I am beginning to feel at times an overpowering hatred of the chair. I have noticed wherever I am I can never get out of its sight: whichever way I look I see it. Why are there no corners to my cell, I could hide myself behind and escape from it? I have piled my straw into a barricade to shut it out from view, which means I have only the bare floor to sleep on—there is not enough for both purposes.

April 31st.

An awful feeling has come over me, and I have no means of discovering the truth. I am being watched, and yet I cannot find out how. There is

a key in the lock, so it cannot be that way. I think it must be from the opposite side of the yard. To-night I must brace myself together and grope at that end for the spy-hole.

I am certain someone is watching me, because when I awoke this morning I found I was staring at that cursed chair. The cowards had seen through my plan and taken away all the straw; so there is nothing between it and myself except twenty paces.

May 2nd.

Was I awake or did I dream it? I saw a black figure behind the chair last night, and the iron collar was opening and shutting. Paralysed with fear, I could not utter a sound, and lay in a fixed trance till it disappeared through the wall.

* * *

I have just been to see it. It is true—I was not dreaming: the collar hinge and screw were covered with oil!

They evidently think——

May 4th.

I wonder what would happen if I sat in the chair? Would it hurt very much? I have seen them in the market-place in Madrid. Bah! they were not pleasant to look at, with their eyeballs staring out of their sockets. I was told it depended on the executioner how long it took to die. I must ask the jailer when he visits me to-morrow.

To-morrow! This endless monotony is growing on me. At first I talked to myself, but soon gave it up, as I found singing created more sound. Sound! That's it. I must have sound! There is not even an echo here, it is all a white, clammy stillness. I

might be dead, buried alive, not even mice as companions.

What a pity I wrung the creature's neck! Perhaps I could have smuggled it in.

May 8th.

I wonder if I am losing my voice! What an awful thought! As usual I was singing that old Pyrenean ballad, when I suddenly knew I was becoming deaf, as it seemed I was singing in a whisper. I increased the effort of voice and found I could hear no better, or little so. If it had been deafness I should hear more distinctly, so I fear I must be losing my power of making a noise. Great God! what a fate!

* * *

I don't know what date it is, I have lost count.

There is someone looking at me from behind the chair. I can see him—or, rather, his eyes—quite distinctly. I must go and see where the holes in the wall are . . . .

I seem to hear bells ringing. It must be a Sunday, and the people are going to church. Why am I not going also?

Those eyes! I can see them from here as I write, absolutely clearly: I follow them up to the very foot of the chair, and they disappear. I don't understand what became of them.

What do you think I did last night? You could never guess. It was quite in the night I did it: only the blackness saw me. There was no one sitting in the chair, and it looked cold and empty, so I took

off my coat and, creeping up to it, suddenly smothered it in it.

It took it by such surprise that it could do nothing, and I laughed till the tears rolled down my face.

There have been three or four nights since I last wrote my diary . . . . but I know only I am still alone : that is, in the daytime, for at night I have a companion. It is my doomed spirit, and it sits in the chair till morning . . . . .

It has taken to beckoning to me; but I won't go, I am going to live here for ever and ever.

(*Here diary becomes nothing but disjointed phrases*).

I have been talking to my familiar, and he told me it was nearly time . . . . .

I don't believe him, and I shall not obey him. I feel a queer bursting sensation in my head. I wonder if the chair is comfortable? I should like to try it.

The pain in my head is increasing.

I saw the figure oiling during the night.

It must be more comfortable sitting there than on these hard boards.

I can hear no sound now, though I have been shouting my utmost!

I am wearied out in my room; I don't care what becomes of me.

My spirit never leaves the chair. How foolish to think he did! It was only the light that made it look as if he had gone.

He is always making signs to go to him. But not yet—I am not ready yet.

I think I shall go to him to-night; it is wrong to keep him waiting longer.

* * *

Yes, I'm coming.

Don't you hear me shouting to you? I'm coming now—at once.

* * *

Here the MS. abruptly concludes.

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